

# AT THE EDGE

Exploring new  
interpretations of  
past and place in  
archaeology, folklore  
and mythology

No.9 March 1998

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ANCESTRAL AND SUPERNATURAL PLACES IN  
EARLY ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Mythology of the  
Northern Polar Regions

Hearing is Believing

SOUNDING THE

Myth before Babel LANDSCAPE

The Guramooguck

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Reconstruction by Norman Fahy (based on  
archaeological information supplied by Howard  
Morgan) depicting an Anglo-Saxon cremation  
burial in a prehistoric barrow.

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# Ancestral and Supernatural Places in early Anglo-Saxon England

HOWARD WILLIAMS was an undergraduate in Archaeological Science at Sheffield University and moved to Reading to complete a Masters in Burial Archaeology. He is currently a postgraduate at Reading University studying for a PhD in early Anglo-Saxon cremation burial rites. This work hopes to reappraise Anglo-Saxon cremation practices through an analysis of the available archaeological evidence combined with extensive use of ethnographic sources for cremation the world over.

**In studying the archaeology and history of the early Anglo-Saxon period I have become puzzled by a number of questions concerning pre-Christian rituals and religion in the British Isles. Why does our understanding of Anglo-Saxon paganism continue to be dominated by inadequate written sources and often ambiguous place-name evidence? Why is there a reluctance in using the archaeological evidence when so much is available? Why are discussions of the archaeological evidence used to identify pre-Christian religious practices restricted to description rather than theoretically informed interpretation of the evidence? I hope to try and answer these questions by a new look at some of the evidence for mortuary practices, not by looking at grave goods, but at the landscape context of burial sites.**

The scant and biased nature of the written evidence for pagan religion allows only generalised studies pulling together information for the whole first millennium AD from vast tracts of northern Europe (Flint 1993). However, this approach may be criticised as not regarding the changing social and political contexts of religion and ritual (Wood 1995). There remain intractable questions concerning how far back we can trace myths and religious practices that are often not written down until the later Middle Ages. The written sources of later Anglo-Saxon period not only see the pagan

period through a Christian lens, we must also allow the possibility that this lens creates an image of paganism that was never there in the first place. In many ways the place-name evidence for paganism is no better and remains extremely limited (Meaney 1995, Wilson 1992).

Working from written and place-name evidence it is justifiable to question whether there ever was a uniform religious belief system that can be called Anglo-Saxon paganism, and whether full-time ritual specialists existed beyond the confines of royal courts. So where do we go from here in search of Anglo-Saxon non-Christian religious practices? Certainly reappraisals of the written and place-name evidence from new perspectives and by informed scholars are likely to bring out more details. But can archaeology take us beyond the limitations of the written and place-name evidence?

For the early Anglo-Saxon period our archaeological evidence we rely upon the evidence from a handful of excavated settlement sites and large numbers of cemeteries. These burial sites are usually partially excavated with greatly varying degrees of competence and sometimes the results remain unpublished. Religious interpretations and ethnic interpretations of the burial evidence are distinctly unpopular with archaeologists who prefer social and political explanations. For example, it has been convincingly argued that not everyone in England following Germanic funerary traditions are likely to have been immigrants from Germany or southern Scandinavia. Instead they represent indigenous groups adopting new fashions of treating the dead. Similarly, it has been argued that we cannot directly infer religious practices from the archaeological record. Christian communities could have buried with grave goods, pagan communities might not have. Both Christians and pagans seem to have oriented their inhumed dead west-east. (see Halsall 1995 for an introduction).

However, I consider that such a viewpoint misunderstands the nature of mortuary practices and their central role in traditional societies. It also under-estimates the importance of material culture and monuments in the symbolism of these rituals. We cannot divorce social and political explanations of mortuary practices from their religious and ethnic contexts.





and our inability to identify clear evidence for paganism does not mean that pre-Christian peoples did not have complex and elaborate attitudes towards the world, the afterlife and relationships with ancestors and deities.

4 A further difficulty comes from the characterisation of religion in terms of personal belief and ideas rather than actions and practice. Most people within a Christian-dominated world are under the impression that religion is about belief and faith and even atheists construct their arguments in these terms. An obsession with symbolism and meaning over practical action can be seen as a weakness of early post-processual approaches in archaeology. This approach may be misplaced. Religion may be very different in traditional societies from our modern Western perceptions of what religion is about. For example, in many societies there are no clear and definite ideas about an afterlife and many different levels of understanding of the symbolism of mortuary practices depending upon one's own social identity and privileged access to the knowledge of rituals. Similarly, many scholars in anthropology, archaeology and history have emphasised the importance of action, performance and movement over ideas and belief in ritual and religion (e.g. Hill 1994, Price 1984). These might take the form of public rituals such as processions and feasting. For example, in his recent book, *The Convert Kings*, Nicholas Higham (1997) has realised that the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity cannot be understood in terms of personal belief. Conversion, he states, was related to its political and social context, and could be related to signs of political strategies by rulers trying to affirm and expand their power and authority. In extreme cases it can be argued that the meanings of rituals are relatively inconsequential in contrast to the participation and

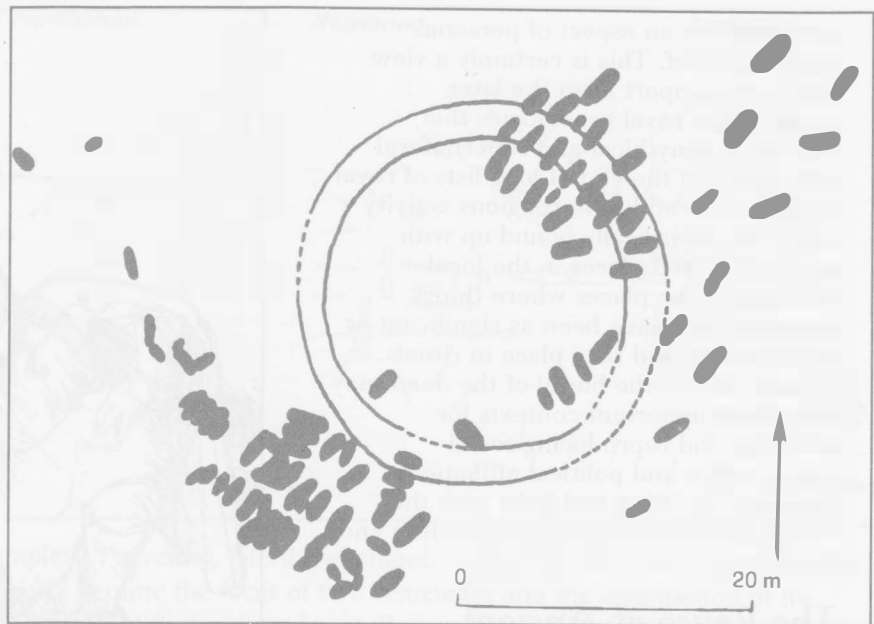


Fig 2: Excavations at Mill Hill, Deal, Kent by Keith Parfitt show a Bronze Age barrow influencing the placing and orientation of Anglo-Saxon graves of the sixth century.

involvement concerning their efficacy and significance for past societies. For example, concerning temple ceremonies in Bali the famous anthropologist Clifford Geertz stated that 'Belief is not important - as long as you perform the ritual duties'. (Geertz 1973: 177).

Performing the ritual correctly and not personal faith is what really matters in Balinese rituals, and probably in many other religious systems around the world including many Christian ritual contexts! In Bali you were not ostracised for not believing, only for not acting in the appropriate ritual manner (Geertz 1973). Instead, rituals can be theatrical performances of formula, orientation and directionality in which actors and onlookers are bound together in social relations at particular times and particular places (Parkin 1992). This is an important lesson for Anglo-Saxon England. While personal belief is not irrelevant, practical actions are much more important in traditional societies.

Yet how else, rather than by archaeology, can we identify real, ritual actions that occurred in the early Anglo-Saxon

period? In this context it is rather ironic and contradictory that Higham fails to use archaeological evidence in his interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon conversion from paganism to Christianity.

From this discussion we should begin to appreciate the importance of practical actions and performances as the most significant aspect of rituals in past societies including pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England. We can also see that by looking beyond strange and unusual practices and artefacts can we identify religious practices enmeshed in daily and ritual practices such as those surrounding death. Only once we dismiss prior assumptions concerning how we see Anglo-Saxon paganism can we begin to address the archaeological evidence for burial sites and funerary monuments in early Anglo-Saxon England from a new perspective. Cults to particular deities may have been bound up with affiliation and membership of particular families, households, lineages, communities or other social groups. Veneration of particular ancestors and deities was therefore a political and social

act as well as an aspect of personal religious belief. This is certainly a view that gains support from the later Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies that incorporate mythical and supernatural individuals at the end of long lists of royal ancestors. In addition, religious activity would be intrinsically bound up with series of sacred places in the local landscape. The places where things occurred may have been as significant as what actually did take place in rituals. Rituals such as the burial of the dead may have been important contexts for asserting and reproducing social relationships and political affiliations between the living and links with the recent dead and long dead ancestors and deities.

## The Reuse of Ancient Monuments in Anglo-Saxon England

These views can be supported through a brief summary of the evidence and interpretation of the reuse of old monuments in the Anglo-Saxon period. From the late fifth century to the end of the seventh century AD there was no such thing as England or even the Anglo-Saxons (see Higham 1995). A diversity of Germanic groups immigrated into southern and eastern England during this period arriving from diverse regions from Frisia to southern Norway although mainly from lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein. It is extremely likely that they were always a sizeable minority of the population of lowland Britain, more than an elite but less than a unified folk. These immigrants assimilated into indigenous sub-Roman cultural and political systems, or overtook them and transformed them into kingdoms that at face value appear completely Germanic. New tribal and ethnic identities had to be constructed in this period from this mixture of indigenous and immigrant groups and the Tribal Hidage dated either to the seventh or eighth century reveals a complex pattern of small and medium sized kingdoms across lowland Britain ruled by Germanic elites.

Against this historical background, it is interesting that during this period, communities seem to have deemed ancient, abandoned and overgrown structures and monuments as appropriate places for the burial of the dead. There is little reason to suppose that this practice was due to practical motivations. Instead



Detail of cover illustration by Norman Fahy.

there is every reason to believe that the dead were deliberately associated with monuments that were interpreted as the dwellings of supernatural and ancestral powers. This is supported by later written sources such as the poem *Beowulf* and the *Life of St Guthlac*. In both sources we are confronted with ancient monuments that provided the contexts for the death and burial of two heroic individuals of high status (a pagan king and a hermit saint). Clearly ancient monuments were powerful, liminal places in the landscape that linked past and present, the supernatural and the ancestral with the living.

In total, at least 330 examples of monument reuse have been identified, a substantial fraction of all known early Anglo-Saxon burial sites in southern and eastern England (Williams 1996). A wide variety of monument types are subject to reuse including round, square and long barrows, henges, ringworks, stone circles and linear earthworks. A variety of Roman structures and monuments were subject to reuse in similar ways. The practice is found in many regions of southern and eastern England. For example in his recent and scholarly survey of Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire, Dr John Blair describes numerous examples (Blair 1994) while Dr Sam Lucy has studied similar cases in the cemeteries of East Yorkshire (Lucy 1992). Audrey Meaney's gazetteer of Anglo-Saxon burial sites contains numerous cases of this practice of monument reuse revealed by antiquarian excavations in the nineteenth century. For example, Thomas Bateman, the famous antiquarian of the Peak District uncovered numerous wealthy Anglo-Saxon period burials inserted into prehistoric monuments (see also fig 1).

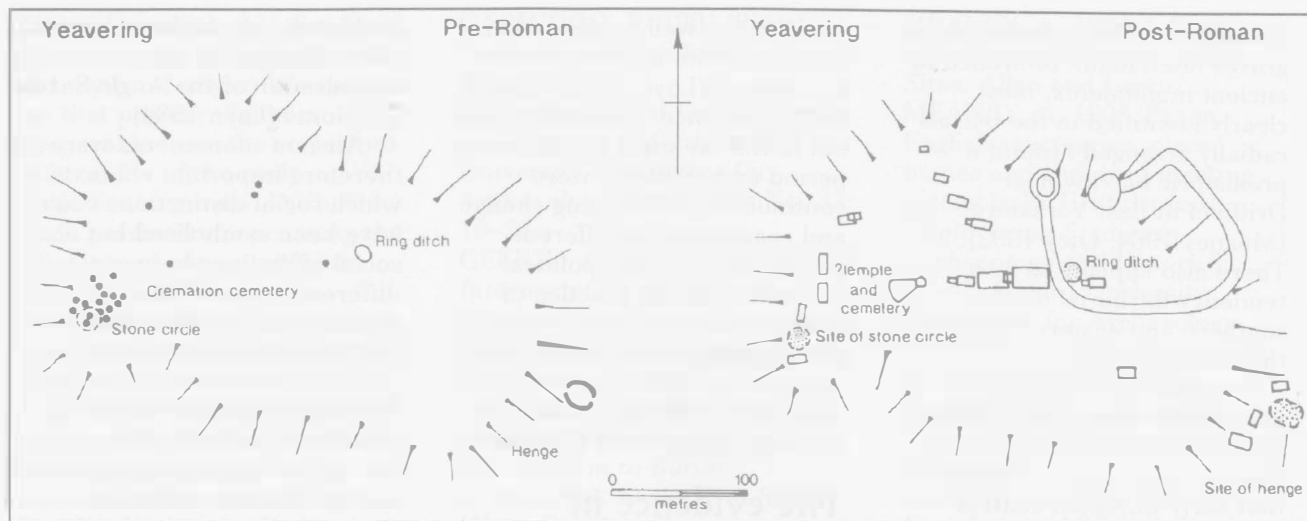


Fig 3: Anglo-Saxon royal palace complex, Yeavinger, Northumberland. Richard Bradley has argued that the prehistoric ring ditch and stone circle became the focus of two cemeteries and the organisation of the contemporary halls in order to establish links with the distant past. Rather than evidence for ritual continuity, the practice represents the invention of tradition. (After Bradley 1987)

However, cases of monument reuse are not confined to the old excavations of antiquarians and new cases continue to be found. Excavations by Sheffield University at Wigber Low supported Bateman's discoveries by finding a Bronze Age cairn reused as a small burial group of wealthy seventh century Anglo-Saxon graves (Collis 1983). New examples of the practice of monument reuse are continually coming to light. Recent excavations at Catterick in North Yorkshire have identified Anglo-Saxon burials inserted into ruinous Roman buildings and a large cemetery adjoining the Roman amphitheatre. At Deal in Kent, Keith Parfitt of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust recently excavated and published a sixth century Anglo-Saxon cemetery focused around a Bronze Age barrow (Parfitt 1994). The Wessex Archaeological Trust have also published discoveries of a seventh century cemetery overlying a Bronze Age barrow near Reading in Berkshire (Butterworth and Cobb 1992). Graves towards the centre of the barrow were shallower, the tops of graves being ploughed out with the remains of the Bronze Age monument. This evidence proved that the monument was still a visible

landmark in the early Anglo-Saxon period. Examples are fewer in some other regions such as Lincolnshire and the west Midlands, perhaps because of unfavourable conditions of monument survival and less thorough excavation of cemeteries in these regions. Between the later fifth and seventh centuries, this reuse of monuments for burial was ostensibly communal, probably a practice of families, households and larger social groups. On other occasions single or small groups of graves were inserted into ancient monuments. In this way, the communities of the living and the dead were bound to ancient monuments.

During the seventh century, elite groups can be seen to exclusively reuse ancient monuments (fig 3; Bradley 1987). The best known example is the wealthy female bed burial inserted into a Bronze Age barrow on Swallowcliffe Down in Wiltshire (Speake 1989). Van De Noort (1993) has recently argued that this monument reuse was practiced by those who were too poor to afford the building of a new Anglo-Saxon barrow. If this were so, why are the wealthiest female graves, and many wealthy male graves inserted into ancient

monuments? We must assume that the kin of these individuals could easily have organised the building of a new funerary monument if this was deemed necessary. Clearly elite groups were deliberately reusing ancient monuments because they held associations that new monuments could not hold, links with the distant past, ancestors and the supernatural.

The interest in ancient monuments was not limited to inserted graves into ancient monuments. At Yeavinger, timber posts were placed into ancient monuments, a phenomenon that may have existed elsewhere. Mortuary enclosures could be occasionally placed around ancient monuments. It is debatable whether the limited evidence for this practice represents the archaeological evidence for pagan temples (contra Blair 1995), but they are clearly structures associated with the graves of the dead and were deliberately elaborating ancient monuments. Other prehistoric barrows could be enlarged and new barrows built over them. Indeed, it can even be argued that the origin of Anglo-Saxon barrow burial was inspired by a desire to emulate or evoke associations with the form and character of ancient

monuments. The orientation of graves often made reference to ancient monuments, most clearly identified in the burials radially arranged around a prehistoric barrow near Driffield in East Yorkshire (Meaney 1964; Lucy 1992). There also appears to be a tendency for burial on the southern and eastern sides of these monuments.

It would be a mistake to assume that the practice was limited to the pagan period. There is increasing evidence that early Christian centres from the seventh century were deliberately focused on old monuments. These included not only Roman structures that may have been interpreted as abandoned Roman churches, but also prehistoric monuments as well that could have been seen as the graves of martyrs. Elite secular settlements as well as burial sites continue to reuse ancient monuments at least into the eighth century. At Thwing on the East Yorkshire Wolds, a Bronze Age earthwork was enlarged and contained an elite residence, burial site and possible chapel (Manby 1986). During this period we seem to see the increasing placing of execution sites and burials around Roman and prehistoric monuments. The predominantly male graves, many with evidence of violent injuries found inserted next to the villa at Shakenoak in Oxfordshire, and the decapitated burials inserted into a barrow on Roche Court Down in Wiltshire provide just two examples (Blair 1994, Meaney 1964). Clearly these monuments were also regarded as powerful, but in a malign sense. Dangerous places associated with the deviant bad deaths of criminals and those denied burial on consecrated ground. From the late Anglo-Saxon period we can identify the use of ancient monuments reused for assemblies and hundred meeting places, perhaps continuing the tradition of associating ancient monuments with gatherings for ritual

practices as well as sites where royal and elite authority could be exacted (Loyn 1984). Clearly the significance of ancient places outlasted the early Anglo-Saxon period and attitudes were continuously undergoing change and reappraisal in different social, religious and political contexts. Yet the practice of monument reuse had its roots in the pagan period when ancient monuments were consistently identified with the distant past through the burial of the dead.

## The evidence in context

This evidence may be all very interesting, but what does it tell us about Anglo-Saxon religion and ritual? Firstly, it is evident that early Anglo-Saxon religious practices, both pagan and Christian were bound to localities and worship invested in ancient places. Also, ancient monuments were associated with the liminality of the funerary ritual process, the transformation of the roles and identities of the dead and the survivors with reference to the presence of ancestors and deities (Huntingdon and Metcalf 1991). Such places may have been the dwellings of the spirits of the dead, or points of access to supernatural realms where the dead and other beings were believed to reside. Moreover they were places for large meetings of people from different communities, brought together for the burial of the dead. No doubt other forms of social activity took place at these places that remain invisible in the archaeological record - such as feasting, the negotiation of dispute settlements, pagan (and later Christian) religious observances and the passing of laws and agreements. The presence of real and imagined ancestors in the form of ancient monuments may have been essential for the success and prosperity of the living and society. In this context we must understand the emergence of moot points at

prehistoric monuments, meeting places integral to the organisation of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Loyn 1984).

Ancient monuments were therefore important contexts at which social distinctions could have been symbolised but also social affiliations between different groups were established (Barrett 1994). At one level the evidence is testimony to the enduring legacy of prehistoric and Roman structures in the landscapes of the medieval and post-medieval world. These monuments demanded interpretation by early medieval peoples. They would have been encountered during the routines of daily life and would have been the repositories for myths, stories and histories along with the bodies of the dead.

Knowledge of the meanings of the ancient monuments may have been restricted to certain privileged members of Anglo-Saxon communities to the exclusion of others. For the community the placing of the dead at ancient monuments may have been a symbol of the relationship between the living, the dead, the land, the ancestors, the supernatural and the past. To others, seeing the cemetery or hearing about it, the relationship might have been a symbol of identity, a territorial marker or perhaps an explicit symbol of domination of one social group over others such as the military and cultural hegemony of Germanic groups over indigenous groups (see Härke 1994). Whatever the exact interpretations imposed upon these monuments, it is clear that they held a central role in the symbolism and social significance of mortuary practices and early Anglo-Saxon societies.

We cannot explain Anglo-Saxon paganism in terms of the reuse of ancient monuments alone. But what this evidence does suggest is that religious and ritual beliefs were constructed and maintained at the local level, in the rituals that linked people, their ancestors to



the land in which they lived and their idealised visions of the past and myths of origin. We can also see that pagan religion is inseparable from the social and political life of the early Anglo-Saxon period. With so much pessimism concerning the reliability of our sources for religious belief in the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon period, I believe that the evidence for monument reuse as early Anglo-Saxon burial sites can tell us a great deal about the ritual and religious practices of societies before and during Christianisation. It also urges us to look again at the archaeology to provide new insights and ideas to question and perhaps overturn our own preconceptions and expectations concerning pre-Christian religion.

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# The Mythology of the Northern Polar Regions

CHET VAN DUZER is the author of *Duality and Structure* in the Iliad and Odyssey (Lang 1996), a study of narrative patterns in Homer's epics. He has also studied the composition of ancient Greek vase paintings, has a continuing interest in Renaissance cartography, and is currently researching an Atlas of Islands on Islands.

Where is the center of the world? Is it the omphalos in the adytum of Apollo's temple at Delphi? The 'Navel of the World' pillar in the catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem?<sup>1</sup> The temple of Madhyameshrava, 'The Lord of the Centre,' in the holy city of Benares, India? Easter Island in the South Pacific, whose ancient name, 'To Pito o Te Henua,' means 'the navel of the world'? The stone marking Kilomètre Zéro on the Ile de la Cité, Paris, just in front of Notre Dame? The Kanro-dai pillar at the Tenrikyo Main Sanctuary in Tenri, Japan? The monument at El Mitad del Mundo, 22 km north of Quito, Ecuador? Lake Poso in the centre of the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia, the pivot of the earth and heavens, and the spot where a rope once joined the two?

Sacred centres are usually located near the people in whose mythology they play a part,<sup>2</sup> but there are distant spots on the earth that many different peoples recognize have a special central status: the North and South Poles. These spots are pierced by the axis of the heavens; they are the crowns of the world, about which all the stars dance, the points to which all compasses direct their needles. The recognition of the centrality of the earth's poles is reflected in one of the names of sacred centres, axis mundi, as well as in various attempts to connect sacred centres with the Poles. The city of Beijing is known as the 'Pivot of the Four Quarters', and the sacred centre of the city, the Forbidden City, is more precisely known as the 'Purple Forbidden City' (Zi Jin Cheng), purple being the symbolic color of the North Star, and the

designation 'Purple Forbidden City' thus signifying that the emperor's residence is the centre of the world.<sup>3</sup> There was also a ninth-century Islamic tradition, argued by al-Kisa'i of Kufa, that the Kaaba in Mecca (for which 'the centre of the earth' is a common epithet among Muslims) is located directly beneath the North Star.<sup>4</sup>

Thus symbolism of or connection with the Pole (in this paper I will be dealing almost exclusively with the North Pole) is often ascribed to local sacred centres, while the Pole itself, until this century both in belief and in fact unattainable, has received little mythological attention as a centre. I will examine two systems of mythology relating to the northern polar regions, systems which, though from

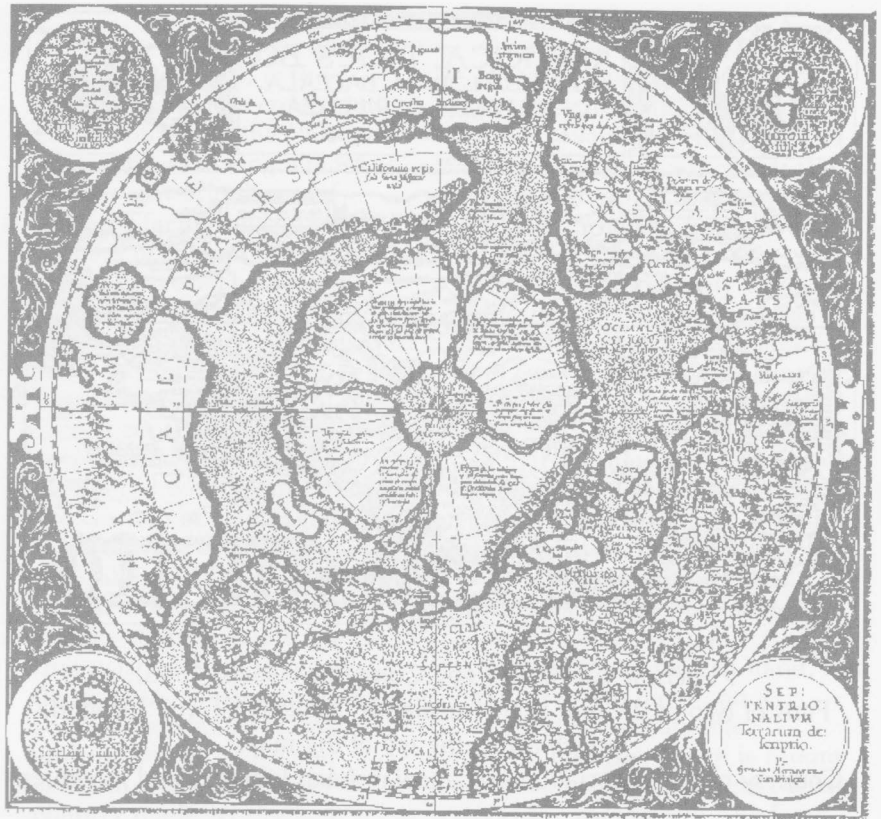
very different cultures, turn out to be remarkably similar.

Gerardus Mercator (1512–94) is perhaps the only figure in the history of cartography whose name has become a household word, and his system of map projection, called the Mercator projection, is still widely used today, albeit usually in slightly modified forms. Mercator was famous for his meticulous research and accuracy, and thus it is quite a surprise to see for the first time Mercator's map of the northern polar regions, *Septentrionalium terrarum descriptio* (1595)<sup>5</sup>: the map shows a North Pole that is very unfamiliar to modern eyes (see figure 1). At the centre of the map, and right at the Pole, stands a huge black mountain; this mountain was made of lodestone, and was the source of the earth's magnetic field.<sup>6</sup> The central mountain is surrounded by open water, and then further out by four large islands that form a ring around the Pole. The largest of these islands is perhaps 700 by 1100 miles, and they all have high mountains along their southern rims. These islands are separated by four large inward-flowing rivers, which are aligned as if to the four points of the compass—though of course there is no north, east, or west at the North Pole: every direction from this centre is south. Mercator's notes inform us that the waters of the oceans are carried northward to the Pole through these rivers with great force, such that no wind

could make a ship sail against the current. The waters then disappear into an enormous whirlpool beneath the mountain at the Pole, and are absorbed into the bowels of the earth. Mercator also tells us that four-foot tall Pygmies inhabit the island closest to Europe.

More remarkable than this map itself is the fact that many other contemporary maps, maps by the most respected cartographers of the time, show a very similar configuration around the North Pole. Martin Behaim, who died before Mercator was born, made a famous globe in 1492 (this is in fact the oldest surviving terrestrial globe) that shows land surrounding the North Pole. There are two large islands right near the Pole in the western hemisphere, while extensions of Europe and Asia reach northwards so as to form, together with the two islands just mentioned, a broken circle of land around the Pole. A world map by Johannes Ruysch, the *Universalior cogniti orbis tabula*, published in an edition of Ptolemy's *Geographia* in Rome in 1508, shows four islands around the North Pole: two (the one north of Greenland and its opposite across the Pole) are labeled 'Insula Deserta'; the one north of Europe is that of the Hyperboreans; and the one north of America is labeled 'Aronphei'. He labels the waters within the four islands as the 'Mare Sugenum,' and speaks of a violent whirlpool that sucks the incoming waters down into the earth; in addition, his map shows a ring of small, very mountainous islands around the four islands, which numerous islands Ruysch says are uninhabited.

Other maps that show these northern islands include:<sup>7</sup> Orontius Finaeus' *Nova et Integra Universi Orbis Descriptio*, published in 1534–6, but designed about 1519 for Francis I; Abraham Ortelius' famous *Typus Orbis*



*Septentrionalium terrarum descriptio* by Gerardus Mercator (1595).

Mercator and other cartographers are quite clear that the rivers flow inward towards the pole, though the deltas at the southern ends of the rivers seem to suggest that the reverse is the case.

Courtesy of the Association of Canadian Map Libraries and Archives.

*Terrarum* (1570) and also his *Septentrionalium regionum descriptio* (1570), which latter follows Mercator particularly closely; the anonymous world map in George Best's *True Discourse* (London, 1578); Cornelius Judaeis' *Speculum orbis terrae* of 1593, as well as his maps of *Quiviriae regnum* and *Americae pars borealis* (also 1593; see figure 2); and Petrus Plancius' *Orbis terrarum typus de integro multis in locis emendatus* (1594), published in Jan Huygen van Linschoten's *Itinerario* (1596), as well as his influential *Nova et exacta terrarum orbis tabula geographica ac hydrographica* (Amsterdam and/or Antwerp, 1592). There are many, many other contemporary maps – literally scores, including examples from as late as the 1700s – that show the same configuration of islands around the Pole.<sup>8</sup>

## The *Inventio fortunata*

The suggestion that there must be a large mountain of lodestone at the North Pole to account for the earth's magnetism goes back to at least the thirteenth century, not long after the invention of the compass,<sup>9</sup> but what was the source of the four islands and the inward-flowing rivers, of the mountains and the Pygmies? Mercator cites his authority for his delineation of the northern regions: the *Itinerarium* of a Flemish traveler named Jacobus Cnoyen (now lost); Cnoyen gave as his sources the *Res gestae Arturi britanni* (now lost), and a book written by an English Minorite, a mathematician from Oxford, who had traveled in the far north in 1360 and recorded what he saw; this work was called the *Inventio fortunata*, which also, (ironically, in light



*Americae pars borealis* by Cornelius Judaeis (1593).

Parts of two of the four northern islands, labelled "[Terra] Incognita" stretch across the top of the map.

Courtesy of the Association of Canadian Map Libraries and Archives.

of its title) is lost.<sup>10</sup> Ruysch cites the same sources, and Fridtjof Nausen argues convincingly that Behaim was working from the *Inventio fortunata* also.<sup>11</sup> Mercator and his contemporaries believed the author of the *Inventio fortunata*, the English Minorite, to be Nicholas de Linna (Nicholas of King's Lynn); others have argued against this identification.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the source of this mythical polar geography is a lost work by an unknown author of the fourteenth century. Nonetheless, it is possible to speculate about where the author of the *Inventio fortunata* may have derived this geography. Fridtjof Nausen has found mentions of a great northern whirlpool in Norse legends of the world's well, 'Hvergelmer,' which causes the tides by pushing and pulling water through its subterranean channels, Isidore of Seville (c.560–636), the *Gesta hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* of Adam Bremensis (eleventh century), the *Topographia hibernica* of Giraldus Cambrensis (1146–1220; his description of the

northern whirlpool is cited by Mercator), the *Historia norvegiae* (c.1180), the *Speculum regale* (c.1250) of Einer Gunnarson, and a particularly interesting quote from the Langobard author Paulus Warnefridi (c.720–790), also called Diaconus:

'And not far from the shore which we before spoke of, on the west, where the ocean extends without bounds, is that very deep abyss of waters which we commonly call the ocean's navel. It is said twice a day to suck the waves into itself, and to spew them out again: as is proved to happen along all these coasts, where the waves rush in and go back again with fearful rapidity. . . . By the whirlpool of which we have spoken it is asserted that ships are often drawn in with such rapidity that they seem to resemble the flight of arrows through the air; and sometimes they are lost in the gulf with a very frightful destruction. Often just as they are about to go under, they are brought back again by a sudden shock of the waves, and they are sent out again thence with the same

rapidity with which they were drawn in.'<sup>13</sup>

Delno West has argued that for the author of the *Inventio fortunata*, the whirlpool at the North Pole represented an entrance to Hell, which was believed to be in the centre of the earth, and also that the four inward-flowing rivers and whirlpool are the counterpart to the fountain in the Garden of Eden, whence the four great rivers branch out to water the world (see Genesis 2:10–14) if the rivers flow out, they must flow back in somewhere and be recycled.<sup>14</sup>

West's argument that the author of the *Inventio fortunata* saw the whirlpool as an entrance to Hell seems far-fetched, as neither the map makers nor any of the author's likely textual sources for the whirlpool mention that it was an entrance to Hell. West's suggestion of a connection between the northern whirlpool and the fountain in the Garden of Eden is very intriguing, but it must be noted that there is no evidence that Behaim, Ruysch, Mercator, and the other cartographers who followed the geography of the *Inventio fortunata* believed that the northern whirlpool was the counterpart to the fountain in Eden. The Garden of Eden may have been a fixture on medieval *mappae mundi* (i.e. world maps more or less contemporary with the *Inventio fortunata*; see for instance the Hereford *Mappa Mundi* of c.1280), but it appears on none of the maps under consideration here. Indeed the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher (1602–80), who published the earliest chart of the global ocean circulation in his *Mundus subterraneus* (1665), and who follows the geography of the *Inventio fortunata* in asserting that there is a whirlpool at the North Pole sucking in the waters of all the oceans, also asserts that the waters emerge again, not in Eden, but at the South Pole.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, I believe that the analogy between the polar geography of the *Inventio*

*fortunata* and the Garden of Eden is important.

The persistence of the *Inventio fortunata* geography on maps for, say, 150 years is to some extent a testament to the esteem in which Mercator and Ortelius were held by other cartographers: it is also, I think, a testament to the great psychological and mythical power of the concept of the centre. It was well-known that the North Pole was the true centre of the earth, and the author of the *Inventio fortunata* gave an account of the geography that was so mythologically satisfying, that it continued to be believed or at least repeated well past the time when scholars and explorers knew that the account was false. Many sacred centres are aligned to the four cardinal directions: the Purple Forbidden City has four gates opening out to the four cardinal directions; the Throne Room of the Royal Palace of King Mindon, a perfect square oriented to the cardinal directions, was in the middle of Mandalay, which is thought to be the centre of Burma, and hence of creation; above the throne room rose a gold-plated, seven-story, 256 feet-high tower or *pyathat*, which was thought to funnel the wisdom of the universe to the king in its centre.<sup>16</sup> The Great Temple Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City) was at the centre of the island, the first spot colonized, and the spot where the eagle eating the serpent on the cactus was seen, and the sacred precinct had gates in the four directions. And many other examples of sacred centres oriented to the cardinal directions come to mind -- not least the Garden of Eden with its four streams.

The *Inventio fortunata* places a mountain at the Pole, and of course many sacred centres are mountains: a passage into the depths of the earth is another common feature of sacred centres. Moreover, the powerful flow of water from the four corners of the earth in through

the rivers to the Pole, and there down a whirlpool, is the strongest possible confirmation and emphasis of the Pole's centrality, as strong almost as the thought of millions of Muslims facing Mecca from all corners of the earth five times a day in prayer. This role the North Pole plays in the circulation of the earth's waters gives the spot the global importance we expect of a sacred centre. Also a number of sacred centres seem to be connected with primal waters: the Garden of Eden again; the Rock of the Temple of Jerusalem, which closes 'the mouth of the tehom,' or the watery chaos beneath the earth that was involved in Noah's flood; Uisneach Hill in Ireland, seat of the Stone of Divisions, and the centre of Ireland according to the division of the country made by the god Fitnán, son of Ocean, was also the source of the waters of the Deluge; and the mountain Haraiti or Alburz, to the east of Iran, which is the 'navel of waters,' as the fountain of all waters springs there.<sup>17</sup>

Thus the surprisingly long survival of the *Inventio fortunata* geography reflects the mythological power of that geography: it asserted a polar configuration consistent with people's expectations for one of two spots on the planet pierced by the celestial axis.

## Hindu and Buddhist conceptions of the earth

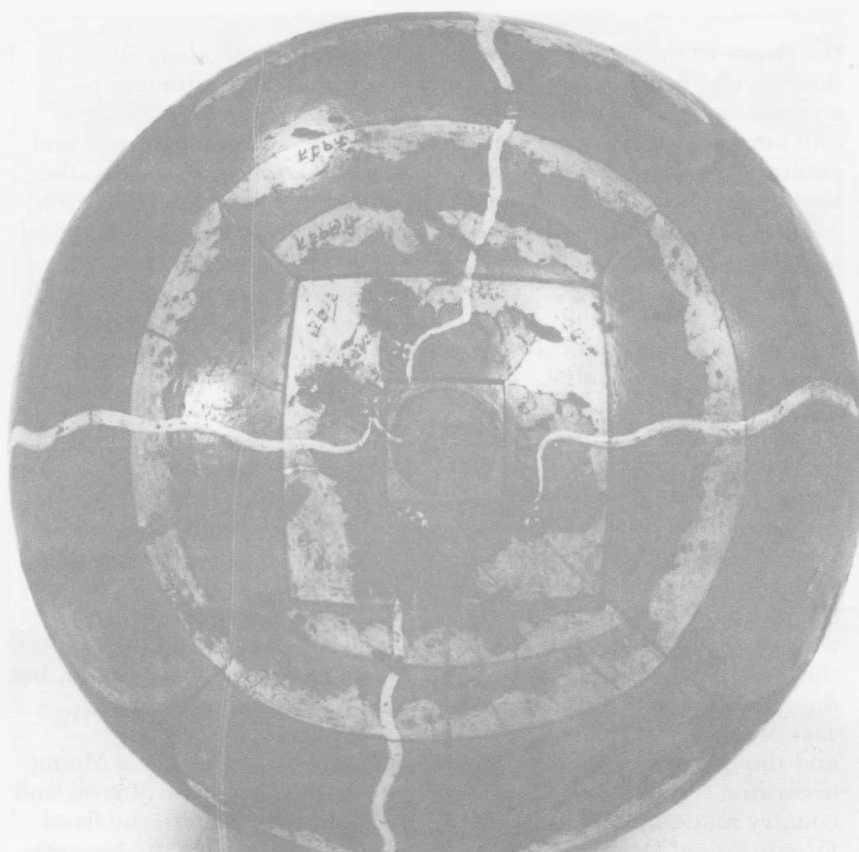
The other example of northern polar mythology I would like to examine is the Brahmanic Hindu and Buddhist conception of the earth.<sup>18</sup> Brahmanic Hindu and Buddhist mythology is very complex, partly because of the creativity of Indian mythographers, which results in many different versions of each myth, and partly because Indian mythographers rarely

abandoned old ideas or theories, but continued to present them alongside new ideas, even when the new and the old were inconsistent; the complexity may increase even further, when one cosmological scheme, for instance, is presented not merely alongside another, but is encapsulated within another.<sup>19</sup> I will look at an early and relatively simple Hindu/ Buddhist conception of the earth, which may be found as part of many later and more complicated schemes: the *catur-dvipa vasumati*, or 'four continent earth' model.

In Bhramanic Hindu and Buddhist belief, the earth's sacred centre is (quite unusually) not near at hand, but far off to the north, on a separate, unattainable continent: the centre is Mount Meru or Sumeru or Sineru, and it is the axis mundi, the fixed point about which the heavens revolve; its summit is the dwelling-place of the Trayastrimsa gods, the highest of the six Buddhist worlds of gods.<sup>20</sup> According to the 'four continent earth' model, the earth's continents are arranged in the form of a lotus flower.<sup>21</sup> Mount Meru stands at the centre of the world, the pericarp or seed-vessel of the flower, as it were, surrounded by circular ranges of mountains. Around Mount Meru, like the petals of the lotus, are arranged four island-continent (*dvipas*), aligned to the four points of the compass: Uttarakuru to the north, Ketumala or Aparagoyana to the west, Bhadrasva or Pubbavideha to the east, and Bharata or Jambudipa to the south; Jambudipa is the part of the world inhabited by humans.

The dimensions of all these elements are fantastic. Mount Meru is 84,000 *yojanas* (420,000 miles) high,<sup>22</sup> and the island-continent of Jambudipa, which includes India, is 10,000 *yojanas* (50,000 miles) in extent, with the area occupied by the Himalayan Range and human habitations being 3,000





Indian wooden cosmological globe. The view is straight down on Mount Meru at the North Pole, which is circled by mountain ranges (three ranges on two of the continents, one on the other two continents); four rivers flow from Mount Meru as if to the four points of the compass down the middle of the four faint island-continent, which stretch southward to the equator.

Courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (I.M. 499-1924).

*yojanas* (15,000 miles) in extent. The level of detail in the descriptions of all these mythical regions is astonishing: there are named mountain ranges, rivers, and races of semi-divine beings everywhere, and we learn the height of each of the races, how long they live, and the shape of their faces. In addition, it was held that near Mount Meru was Lake Anotatta (or Anawdat), which was the source of the world's rivers. The lake is surrounded by a mountainous rim, and through rocky openings in this rim shaped like the heads of an ox, horse, lion, and elephant, four rivers flow to the south, east, north, and west, respectively. These rivers flow three times around Anotatta in spirals, and then continue in their original directions towards

the four cardinal points. The river flowing to the south (from the ox's head) is the proto-Ganges; after dashing against a mountain, spurting high (60 *yojanas*/ 300 miles) in the air, falling back to earth, and following an underground course, it emerges to form five rivers whose names can be traced to rivers in northern India, namely the Ganges and its tributaries.<sup>23</sup>

Mount Meru is the point about which the heavens revolve, the axis mundi, and thus something very similar to the North Pole of the Buddhist/Hindu universe. Indeed, the North Star was held to stand directly above Mount Meru, linked by ropes of wind to all the heavenly bodies.<sup>24</sup> The spot beneath the North Star should,

according to our conceptions, be the North Pole; but the cosmographical texts in this tradition hold that the earth is a flat disc or shallow bowl, and thus the concept of a North Pole is absent. The continent Uttarakuru was held to be north of Mount Meru, and indeed the particle *uttara* means 'north.'

However, there is a very long tradition of Indian cosmological globes: such globes (or *bhugolas*) were known to the Indian astronomer Aryabhata (b. 476), and are frequently described in medieval Indian texts.<sup>25</sup> Transferring the terrestrial features of Hindu cosmography from a flat disc to a sphere required a number of changes, the most important of which was that Mount Meru was moved to the North Pole. The pericarp of the lotus now being at the North Pole, the petals of the lotus, the four continents, stretch southward from Mount Meru towards the equator, and the continent Uttarakuru, whose name implied that it was north of Mount Meru, has its name changed to Kuruvarsa. One such globe, probably made in Orissa in the early to mid-nineteenth century, but depicting cosmological traditions that are centuries older, is illustrated in figure 3.<sup>26</sup>

## Obvious similarities

The similarities between the *Inventio fortunata* and the Brahmanic Hindu and Buddhist conceptions of the northern polar regions of the earth should by now be obvious. Both place a large mountain at the Pole surrounded by four islands aligned as if to the four points of the compass. From the one mountain radiates the earth's magnetic field; the other is the pivot of the universe, and the home of the divine. And while the *Inventio fortunata* has the waters of the world's oceans flowing in towards the Pole from the four quarters and then down into the earth, the Buddhist conception has a large lake with four huge rivers flowing out to the four corners of the earth. Of

course there are many differences between the two conceptions: the one is a more secular or geographical mythology, the other divine, and there are differences of scale, differences in degree of elaboration, the difference between water flowing in and water flowing out, and others. But the similarities are impressive.<sup>27</sup>

To attempt to argue that the *Inventio fortunata* was by some circuitous means derived from Buddhist conceptions of the northern polar regions would be at best a highly precarious undertaking. Quite aside from the inherent improbability of such an influence, when the work itself is lost and its author uncertain, no such argument can have a foot to stand on. I am inclined rather to see the fact that two so similar mythographies of the northern polar regions should arise and persist in two so different cultures as a testament to both the creativity of these two cultures, and to the degree to which these mythographies match our innate transcultural conception of what a sacred centre should be.

## Notes

1. The pilgrim Saewulf, who was in the Holy Land in 1102 and 1103, writes: 'At the head of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, in the wall outside, not far from the place called Calvary, is the place called Compas, which our Lord Jesus Christ himself signified and measured with his own hand as the middle of the world, according to the words of the Psalmist, 'For God is my king of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth'.' Quoted from Thomas Wright, trans. and ed., *Early Travels in Palestine* (London, 1848), p. 38. This tradition has continued for centuries: in 1664 the French priest Eugene Roger in his *La Terre Sainte, ou, Terre de promesse* put forth a detailed argument that the precise centre of the earth is a spot

marked on the pavement of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and the pillar in the Church marks this spot today. For a good discussion of early texts relating to the centrality of Jerusalem (without reference to the pillar in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher) see Philip S. Alexander, 'Jerusalem as the Omphalos of the World: On the History of a Geographical Concept,' *Judaism* 46 No.182 (Spring 1997), p. 147-59.

2. See the discussion of the 'omphalos syndrome' (the tendency to locate the centre of the world near oneself) by J. B. Harley, 'Maps, Knowledge, and Power,' p. 277-312 in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels (eds) Cambridge, 1988.

3. See John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan (eds), *The Power of Place: Bringing together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations* Boston, 1989, p.202-27; and Paul Wheatley, *Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City* Chicago, 1971, passim.

4. Mircea Eliade and Lawrence E. Sullivan, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York, 1987), s.v. 'centre of the World.'

5. The *Septentrionalium terrarum descriptio* was printed (posthumously) in 1595, and is very similar to an inset map of the northern polar region Mercator made on his world map of 1569, *Nova et aucta orbis terrae descriptio ad usum navigantium emendate accommodata*, commonly referred to as *Ad usum navigantium*. The 1595 map has been widely reprinted. The northern islands did not appear on Mercator's world map of 1538.

6. Mercator held that there were two additional magnetic poles north of the strait between Asia and the New World, in order to account for

the deviation of the compass; these do not appear in the *Inventio fortunata*, to be mentioned shortly.

7. It should be noted that on world maps centred on the equator, rather than the Pole, the northern islands appear as elongated strips across the top of the map, due to the distortions involved in projecting the surface of a sphere onto a two-dimensional map. A good source of facsimiles of early maps is Rodney W. Shirley, *The Mapping of the World: Early Printed World Maps 1472-1700* (London, 1983). Mercator's *Septentrionalium terrarum descriptio* was popular enough to inspire a number of blatant imitations, including maps by Matthis Quad (Cologne, 1600), Petrus Bertius and Jodocus Hondius Jr. (Amsterdam, 1616), and Johannes Cloppenburg (Amsterdam, 1630); these are conveniently illustrated in Philip D. Burden, *The Mapping of North America* (Rickmansworth, 1996), p.161, 224, and 278-9.

8. The cartographic influence of Mercator and Ortelius even extended to China: there are Chinese maps that show the northern islands (e.g. Shanghai Yudi Quantu, Complete Geographic Map of the Mountains and Seas, 1609, illustrated in *The History of Cartography*, eds. J. B. Harley and D. Woodward (Chicago, 1987), vol. 2, p.176). These maps are derived from the world maps of the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who established a mission at Zhaoqing Prefecture (in present-day Guangdong Province) in 1583. Mercator-influenced maps also appear in Japan: Abe Yasuyuki's *Banukoku Chikyu Yochi Zenzu* or *Map of the World* (1853), shows the four northern islands; it is illustrated in Hugh Cortazzi, *Isles of Gold: Antique Maps of Japan* (New York, 1983), p.119; also see his p.102. For later fringe believers in a northern hole and/or whirlpool, see Joscelyn Godwin, *Arktos: The*

*Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival* (Grand Rapids, 1993), p.105–123 (Chapter Nine, entitled 'The Hole at the Pole'); and M. Gardner, *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* (New York, 1957), p.19–22. The concept of a northern whirlpool played a central role in an anonymous early science fiction novel, *Le Passage du Pôle Arctique au Pôle Antarctique par le Centre du Monde* (Paris, 1721). Basically though Mercator's view of the northern regions lost favor after 1598, when the Dutchman Willem Barentsz made his famous chart of the northern polar regions showing open water there.

9. Pliny *Naturalis historia* 2.97 (1st century) mentions two lodestone mountains in India, Ptolemy *Geographia* 7.2 (2nd century) mentions ten magnetic islands, the Maniolae, near India, and the ensuing history of magnetic mountain and island myths (chiefly eastern, rather than northern) is traced by A. Graf, 'Un mito geografico (il monte della calamita)', p.363–75 in *Miti, leggende, e superstizione del medio evo* (Torino, 1892–3); also see the works cited by Richard Hennig, *Terrae Incognitae* (Leiden, 1944–56), vol. 3, p. 319–20. The compass is first mentioned by Alexander Neckam in his *De naturis rerum*, written about 1180, though it was probably in use in European ships for some time before that. By 1276, the theory that there was a mountain of lodestone at the North Pole was well enough known for the poet Guido Guinizelli to use it in a simile to describe the power of his lady's love ('Madonna, il fino amor ched eo vo porto,' vv. 49–55):

*In quella parte sotto tramontana sono li monti de la calamita che dān vertud' all'aire di trar lo ferro, ma perch' è lontana, vòle di simil petra aver aita per farlo adoperare che si dirizzi l'ago ver' la stella . . .*  
 'In that land beneath the North Wind Are the magnetic mountains, Which transmit to the air their power To attract

the iron, but because it is far away, It needs help from a similar stone To make the compass needle Turn towards the polestar . . .'

The northern lodestone mountain theory was supported by Girolamo Fracastorio (1483–1553) and Olaus Magnus (1490–1558), who writes in his *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* that ships in the north must be built with wooden pegs, as iron nails would be pulled out by the northern lodestone. The lodestone mountain theory was also popular among Arab sailors: see Ian Darragh, 'Pole Position' *Geographical Magazine*, Sept. 1995, p.30–32. Many medieval and renaissance maps do not show this mountain at the North Pole, but it was 1600 before someone came up with a better explanation of the earth's magnetism: Sir William Gilbert, physician to Queen Elizabeth I, in his famous study *De magnete*, concluded that *magnus magnes ipse est globus terrestris*, 'the earth's globe itself is a great magnet.' Nonetheless, as late as the 1650s Peter Heylyn recounts the *Inventio fortunata* polar geography as fact in the fourth book of his *Cosmographie in Four Books* (London, 1652).

10. For a good discussion of the *Inventio fortunata* and its influence see R. A. Skelton et al., *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* (New Haven, 1965), p.179–82; also see Richard Hennig, *Terrae Incognitae* (Leiden, 1944–56), vol. 3, p.315–323; and B. F. de Costa, 'Arctic Exploration,' *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 12 (1880), p.159–92. Mercator corresponded with John Dee about his map of the northern polar regions and about the *Inventio fortunata*, outlining for Dee the contents of the book, and Mercator's letter remains the best account we have of the contents of the book. See E. G. R. Taylor, 'A Letter Dated 1577 from Mercator to John Dee,' *Imago Mundi* 13 (1956), p.58–68, and also the introduction to

the facsimile edition of Mercator's *Atlas sive cosmographicae meditationes . . .* of 1636, published in the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* series (Amsterdam, 1968). Dee created a world map incorporating the *Inventio fortunata* northern polar geography: it is titled 'Sir Humfray Gylbert knight his chart,' and is dated 1583. Originally in the library of Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland, it is now in the Free Library of Philadelphia. It is illustrated for example in Samuel E. Morison, *The European Discovery of America* (New York, 1971), p.581.

11. Fridtjof Nansen, *In Northern Mists: Arctic Exploration in Early Times*, trans. Arthur G. Chater (New York, 1911) vol. 2, p.288–9.

12. E.g. R. T. Gunther, *Early Science in Oxford*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1923, 1967), p.62–3; for full discussion see the introduction (esp. p.3) to *The Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn*, ed. Sigmund Eisner, trans. Gary Mac Eoin and S. Eisner (Athens, GA, 1980).

13. Fridtjof Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, vol. 2, p.150–9, 184, 195. Reference should also be made to the theory of rivers and seas in Plato's *Phaedo* 111c, according to which all of the rivers of the world flow into a great chasm that pierces the earth from one side to the other; this theory is discussed and criticized by Aristotle *Meteorologica* 2.2.

14. Delno C. West, 'Inventio fortunata and Polar Cartography 1360–1700,' a paper presented at the conference 'De-centring the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in Multi-Disciplinary Perspective 1350–1700,' Victoria University in the University of Toronto, March 7–10, 1996.

15. Kircher, it is interesting to note, was influenced in his theories by the recently discovered circulation of the blood, to which he likens the circulation of the waters through the earth. Mention should be made of the world map of

15. Kircher, it is interesting to note, was influenced in his theories by the recently discovered circulation of the blood, to which he likens the circulation of the waters through the earth. Mention should be made of the world map of Urbano Monte (1544-1613), *Universale geographia et descriptio de tutta la terra* (Milan, 1604), which shows not only the northern islands of the *Inventio fortunata*, but also a similar ring of islands along the Antarctic Circle, around the South Pole; Monte held that water flowed down into the earth at both poles. For illustrations of Monte's maps see Rodney W. Shirley, *The Mapping of the World: Early Printed World Maps 1472-1700*; for discussion see R. Almagià, 'Un prezioso cimelio della cartografia italiana. Il Planisfero di Urbano Monte,' *La Bibliofilia* 43 (1941), p. 156-93, esp. p.189.

16. All this was destroyed on March 20, 1945.

17. On the *tehom* and the Rock of the Temple see Genesis 7:11 and 8:2; Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5 (Philadelphia, 1968), p.15-16; Zev Vilnay, *Legends of Jerusalem* (Philadelphia, 1987), p.78-80; *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. 'centre of the World'; and the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1972), s.v. 'The Deep.' On Uisneach see Michael Dames, *Mythic Ireland* (London, 1992), p.197; John Michell, *At the Centre of the World* (London, 1994); and note that 'Uisneach' derives from the Gaelic root *uisce*, meaning 'water.' And on Mount Haraiti or Alburz see the *Bundahishn*, Chapter 13, in *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 5, trans. W. E. West (Oxford, 1897). Also note that Mount Parnassus, which overlooks Delphi and its omphalos, was the mountain upon which Deucalion's ark landed after the flood, so that this area has both an omphalos and a mountain connected with a flood.

18. One of the classical literary expositions of this cosmography is contained in the Puranic texts known as the *Bhuvanakosa*; another is in the third *kosasthana* of the *Abhidharmakosa* of Vasubandhu, composed in the fourth or fifth century, a basic text of Buddhism. This text has been translated into French by Louis de la Vallée Poussin as *L'Abhidharmakosa de Vasubandhu*, in six volumes (1923-31, 1971), and Poussin's French has been translated into English by Leo M. Pruden as *Abhidharmakosabhasyam* in four volumes (Berkeley, CA, 1988). Also see Sukomal Chaudhuri, *Analytical Study of the Abhidharmakosa* (Calcutta, 1983); W. R. Kloetzli,



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*Buddhist Cosmology: From Single World System to Pure Land; Science and Theology in the Images of Motion and Light* (Delhi, 1983); D. C. Sircar, *Cosmography and Geography in Early Indian Literature* (Calcutta, 1967); R. F. Gombrich, 'Ancient Indian Cosmology' in *Ancient Cosmologies*, ed. C. Blacker and M. Loewe (London, 1975), p. 110-42; Louis de la Vallée Poussin, 'Cosmogony and Cosmology (Buddhist)' in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh, 1911); and W. R. Kloetzli, 'Cosmology: Buddhist Cosmology' in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York, 1987).

19. R. F. Gombrich, 'Ancient Indian Cosmology' in *Ancient Cosmologies*, ed. C. Blacker and M. Loewe (London, 1975), p. 111-2; Joseph Schwartzberg, 'Cosmographical Mapping,' Chapter 16 in vol. 2, p. 333-4 of *The History of Cartography*, eds. J. B. Harley and D. Woodward (Chicago, 1987-).  
20. Mount Kailas in western Tibet, the most sacred mountain in Asia, and known as the 'centre of the Mandala,' is believed to be the physical embodiment or Avatar of the mythical Mount Meru, and this more attainable mountain has been a pilgrimage site for 2,500 years.

21. On this imagery see I. W. Mabbett, 'The Symbolism of Mount Meru,' *History of Religions* 23 (1983), p. 71-2, who cites Visnu Purana 2.2, Devibhagavata Purana 8.6, and Kurma Purana 1.43.9.

22. A *yojana* is generally thought to be from two to nine miles; here and elsewhere I use a conversion factor of 1 *yojana* = 5 miles.

23. For an illustration and discussion of Lake Anotatta and its rivers see *The History of Cartography*, eds. J. B. Harley and D. Woodward (Chicago, 1987-), vol. 2, p. 732-3. Mount Kailas was chosen as an avatar of Mount Meru in part because (or Mount Kailas influenced the

mythography of Mount Meru in that) the headwaters of four major rivers of the Indian subcontinent find their sources within 75 km of Mount Kailas: the Sutlej, the Karnali (a major tributary of the Ganges), the Tsangpo/Brahmaputra and the Indus. In addition, Lake Manasarovar and Lake Rakas Tal, both near Mount Kailas, have at different times both been identified with Lake Anotatta.

24. I. W. Mabbett, 'The Symbolism of Mount Meru,' *History of Religions* 23 (1983), p. 69-70; also see Paul Wheatley, *Pivot of the Four Quarters* (Chicago, 1971), p. 428.

25. Joseph Schwartzberg, 'An Eighteenth-Century Cosmographical Globe from India,' *Cartographica* 30 (1993) p. 75. Aryabhata was the author of the *Aryabhatiyam*, a versified study of mathematics and astronomy; he was the first Indian astronomer to mention that the diurnal motion of the heavens is due to the rotation of the earth about its axis.

26. For discussion of this globe see Joseph Schwartzberg, 'Cosmographical Mapping,' Chapter 16 in vol. 2, p. 352 of *The History of Cartography*, eds. J. B. Harley and D. Woodward (Chicago, 1987-); and Simon Digby, 'The Bhugola of Ksema Karna: A Dated Sixteenth Century Piece of Indian Metalware,' *Art and Archaeology Research Papers* 4 (1973), p. 12-13.

27. Reference should also be made to the fifth century BC Babylonian cosmological map, with descriptive cuneiform text, on a clay tablet in the British Museum (No. 92687). The map has nothing to do with the North Pole, but its sacred centre geography is reminiscent of the *Inventio fortunata* and Buddhist geography: it places Babylon, the 'hub of the universe,' at the centre of a circular inhabited world-disc, which is encircled by the 'Bitter River' or 'Earthy Ocean,' and around the Bitter River there are seven symmetrically placed



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# MYTH BEFORE BABEL

## *On the reconstruction of global proto-myths*

ALBY STONE will need no introduction to regular readers of *At the Edge*. This article is the concluding part of a trilogy which commenced with 'A Threefold Cosmos' in *At the Edge* No.5 and 'A Dream World' in *At the Edge* No.7.

## A Very Brief History of Comparative Mythology

The study of comparative mythology can be said to have begun in Calcutta on February 2, 1786, when Sir William Jones (1746–94) gave his Third Discourse to the Asiatic Society. He said that Sanskrit, Greek and Latin have 'a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could have been produced by accident' [Cannon 1991: 31]. Jones added the Gothic and Celtic languages to these tongues that he proposed were 'sprung from some common source', and Indo-European (IE) comparative linguistics was born. Soon, linguists including Franz Bopp (1791–1867) and August Friedrich Pott (1802–87) made the first attempts to reconstruct the grammar, phonology and vocabulary of that 'common source' [Lehmann 1993: 1–4] – the ancestral language that we now know as Proto-Indo-European (PIE).

Following the lead of comparative linguistics – 'the study of the relationships which exist between cognate languages' [Beekes 1995: 3] – mythologists soon began to compare IE religion and mythologies. The nineteenth century saw a tendency toward naturalistic explanations of 'primitive' mythology, and the first reconstructions established a number of core figures and themes with linguistic cognates, including: a Sky Father (Dyaus Pitar; Jupiter; Zeus; Tyr); a goddess of the dawn (Aurora; Eos); a Child of the Waters (Apam Napat; Neptune). A number of these are still accepted today [Polomé 1991]. Extending the field beyond comparing names, Georges Dumézil's analysis of the function

and attributes of divine figures revealed further common elements, including divine twins associated with equestrianism; a unifying war between deities of the first two functions (sovereignty and physical force) and those of the third (fertility, production); and a divine triad representing the three functions of the IE 'ideology' [Littleton 1982; Puhvel 1987].

As many nineteenth-century mythologists were also linguists it is hardly surprising that mythology took a path running parallel to that taken by linguistics, by studying the relationships between cognate mythologies.

## The Genetic Descent of Language and Myth

Linguists once conventionally assumed that IE was unrelated to any other language family. Some still hold that belief. This stubborn faith in IE as a unique entity has its roots in nineteenth-century Eurocentricism. Even when philologists did look for relationships with other language families, they tended to look for prestigious relatives, such as Semitic – the main branch of the Afro-Asiatic family, which actually has far fewer correspondences with IE than do some others. This selectivity misled generations of Indo-Europeanists and linguists [Ruhlen 1994: 14–15].

Like the languages, the mythologies too seem to be part of an IE 'genetic' inheritance. Dumézil's tripartite schema (still often spoken of as though it were his invention, rather than a discovery) seems to be uniquely IE. While the genetic model of IE language dispersal has been challenged in recent years, none of its critics has yet managed to otherwise account for the linguistic phenomena it explains. The favoured dispersal hypothesis sees IE languages carried from a homeland on the Eurasian steppes, perhaps in a series of migrations – the flawed 'Kurgan hypothesis' of Marija Gimbutas [Mallory 1989: 182–5]. More persuasively,

Colin Renfrew has proposed a 'wave of advance' model that posits a gradual outward spread from an Anatolian source [Renfrew 1987].

Other developments have cast doubt on the isolation of IE, which has now been linked with other families in an extension of the genetic model. If the IE languages can be shown to be descended from an ancestral tongue that also gave rise to other language families, then it ought to follow that the IE mythological system could also have relatives in cultures associated with related language families. The ideal test would be a comparison with already reconstructed proto-myths, but there is a major obstacle: non-IE comparative mythology barely exists. It is largely confined to the Semitic (often extended to include Egyptian and the unrelated Sumerian tongue) and Uralic traditions.

The former, mainly the province of archaeologists and Biblical scholars, is handicapped by the looming presence of Christianity as a significant factor in Europe, and Islam as the dominant force in North Africa and the Near East. In simple terms, it is still very difficult to discuss the underlying mythologies of Judaism, Christianity and Islam without offending one influential group or another. The religious traditions and literatures of Sumer, Babylon and ancient Egypt are fair game, and can be treated as mythologies with impunity; but the roots of the living faiths are another matter altogether. It is widely acknowledged that the 'pagan' traditions of the Near East parallel or mirror material found in Biblical religions, but scholars tend to tread carefully<sup>1</sup>. Uralic studies are different, as there are few religious factors to inhibit debate and theory. Major drawbacks are the general dearth of archaic textual materials, and the erosion of oral tradition. Most source-material comes from Finland and Estonia, and what is left from Russia and Hungary is

severely fragmented, but Uralic comparative mythology progresses. Otherwise – in spite of any number of fine studies of specific, localised cultures past and present – there is no comparable body of comparative mythology for any other family of languages. But is there any reason to suppose that a family of languages *should* have an associated mythology?

## Myth as Genetic Fingerprint

If IE has a myth-system that, alongside the language, acts as a kind of signature of its cultural totality, then why should other language families not possess equivalent mythological signatures? After all, what is a culture if it is not the sum total of its language and literature, myth and religion, traditional beliefs and laws, art, social structure and economic determinants? The IE complex embraces all of these factors, and its signature is the trifunctional set-up, with its derivative ideas and echoes outside the mythology. This accords with the principle established long ago by Emile Durkheim, that religion is essentially a collective representation that binds a society together and acts as a focus of group identity [Durkheim 1915].

The conventional view of language dispersal implies that this should be expected of any cultural continua that are coterminous with language families. This is implicit in the practice of assuming homelands from which proto-forms of language families dispersed and diverged, and in the popular view that culture and language are largely indivisible. For example, reconstruction of PIE vocabulary indicates that the Proto-Indo-Europeans – whoever they were – were pastoralists, familiar with agriculture and possibly a crude metallurgy; that they had priest and warrior classes; and so on [Mallory 1989: ch. 4]. Vocabulary and

grammar were passed from one generation to the next, along with the social and religious structures, myths, and technologies. Like any other people they harked back to the past – the lineage and deeds of ancestors and of the tribe. As tribal or sub-ethnic groups diverged from the original stem(s) and converged in new combinations, all these were passed on in suitably altered forms: PIE was transformed into languages that were subjected to the same process, so producing the Indo-European languages spoken today; technologies associated with metallurgy, herding and farming also evolved and became more complex; changes of location and external pressures subtly influenced myth, religion and social organisations. Innovations occurred, non-IE materials were sometimes added, and some older things were lost.

In short, IE culture, like the language, has undergone exactly the kinds of changes associated with genetic descent. Like a genetic 'fingerprint', the characteristic IE signature demonstrates membership of the family. The linguistic element defines part of that signature. It is also partly defined by the mythic, religious and cosmological structures, as Dumézil recognised.

## Nostratic and Eurasiatic

Earlier this century Holger Pedersen claimed that IE belonged to a greater family of languages that he termed Nostratic [Shevoroshkin and Ramer 1991]. This idea alarmed many isolationist Indo-Europeanists, and did not gain acceptance until it was revived by Aaron Dolgopolsky and Vladislav Illich-Svitych in the 1960s [Shevoroshkin and Ramer 1991; Ruhlen 1994: 15ff]. Recently, Joseph H. Greenberg proposed a rival family, which he calls Eurasiatic [Greenberg 1991]. The difference between the two is illustrated in table 1.

The credentials for Nostratic and Eurasiatic look equally impressive. But why should Nostratic include Afro-Asiatic, Kartvelian and Elamo-Dravidian but not Japanese, Ainu, Gilyak, Chukchi-Kamchatkan and Eskimo-Aleut? Why does Eurasiatic include the latter group but not the former?

The answer lies in the methods used to identify them. Nostratic was arrived at by applying the principles of comparative linguistics in a deliberate attempt to prove that IE is indeed related to other language families. The identification of Eurasiatic resulted from an exercise in classification. This is a subtle technical difference which, although of great import to linguists, does not concern us here [Ruhlen 1994: 15ff, ch. 14]. What matters is that both Nostratic and Eurasiatic embrace numbers of genetically related language families, forming what are in effect macro-families.

The macro-family, whether Nostratic or Eurasiatic, is still a controversial issue, but connections have been made between putative Nostratic and other language families (Austic, Dene-Caucasian, Amerind, Indo-Pacific, Nilo-Saharan, etc) in the last few years. The trend is increasingly toward the identification and partial reconstruction of a global proto-language. Merritt Ruhlen has presented an initial set of 'global etymologies' with cognates in all language families [Ruhlen 1994: 291–328]. Even more remarkable is a singular finding by biologists in the 1980s: that the human genetic tree coincides very closely with the distribution of the language families [Cavalli-Sforza *et al* 1994; Cavalli-Sforza and Cavalli-Sforza 1995: ch 7].

This has enormous implications for mythologists. Assuming that the earliest language-users had some form of myth and/or religion, then it ought to be the case that the 'mytheme-pool', like the genes and languages, continually

bifurcated and mutated (for myth this would be in response to changes in environment, economic requirements and available technology). The idea of myths being dispersed in this way is rather different from the old diffusionist theories, which are really little more than a subtle way of saying that 'inferior' cultures tend to adopt aspects of 'superior' ones – the favoured source of myth and religion inevitably being the Near East. Current thinking on human origins inclines toward the view that *Homo sapiens* first appeared in Africa, with subsequent prehistoric migrations into Europe and Asia, and from there to the rest of the world. If there ever was a proto-mythology before the Tower of Babel fell, it would have long pre-dated the oldest known civilisations.

## Reconstructing a Nostratic Myth

A relatively simple way to test the hypothesis outlined here would be to attempt a reconstruction of a significant Nostratic/Eurasiatic proto-myth. As Nostratic is presently the better established of the two, it would seem the appropriate option. The choice of mytheme is more difficult, but bearing in mind our abiding preoccupation with discovering or explaining how things originated, one would imagine creation mythology to be a fruitful area. As we shall see, the Nostratic comparisons are encouraging.

Fortunately, PIE cosmogony has already been comprehensively reconstructed. In a seminal article, expanded and refined in a later book, Bruce Lincoln has demonstrated that it involved the appearance of a pair of twins, one of whom

NOSTRATIC	EURASIATIC
Afro-Asiatic Kartvelian Elamo- Dravidian	
Indo-European Uralic-Yukaghir Altaic Korean	Indo-European Uralic-Yukaghir Altaic Korean
	Japanese Ainu Gilyak Chukchi-Kamchatkan Eskimo-Aleut

Table 1

killed the other and created the cosmos from the dismembered corpse [Lincoln 1975, 1986]. But it is certain that this cosmogonic sacrifice was itself a secondary phase, which did not take place *ex nihilo*. The first phase was the coming together of two existing elements, fire and water, in an empty space – the primordial twins were formed in the matter that resulted from this union of opposites.

Taking the PIE cosmogony as the first strand, we can add several from the Afro-Asiatic, Uralic and Altaic traditions. Afro-Asiatic cosmogony is represented by the Babylonian creation epic *enuma elis* [Dalley 1989: 233ff] and the Hebrew *Genesis*, with possible displaced cosmogonic material from the *Psalms* given in italics. Uralic creation myths are taken from the Finnish *Kalevala* [Lönnrot, trans. Bosley 1989: 4–10]; and representing Altaic tradition, a selection of motifs from creation stories told by the Tungusian Evenks [Vasilevich 1963: 60–1], with additional material from other Altaic sources in italics [Eliade 1985: 4, 8–10]. The salient features of each are given in table 2.

The Altaic traditions (of which the above is a representative selection) are clearly slightly divergent strains of one basic type of cosmogony.

**A: PROTO-INDO-EUROPEAN**

- a) Fire and water exist, separated by a void.
- b) They meet in the void.
- c) Twins form in the primal matter that results from the united elements.
- d) The twins generate a race of semi-divine beings from their own bodies.
- e) One twin kills the other. This is the first death, the first sacrifice.
- f) The victim is dismembered.
- g) The cosmos is made from the body parts.

**B: BABYLONIAN**

- a) In the beginning are the waters: Apsu (fresh), and Tiamat (salt).
- b) . . . c) From them emerge Lahmu and Lahamu, then -
- d) - other deities who beget Anu (the sky), father of Ea (celestial fresh water). Apsu quarrels with Tiamat, but is killed by Ea. Marduk is created inside Apsu.
- e) Marduk kills Tiamat.
- f) Marduk splits Tiamat in two.
- g) One half of Tiamat's body forms the sky, the other half becomes the earth. Other body parts become features of the landscape.

**C: HEBREW**

- a) The earth is without form and void.
- b) The Spirit of God moves upon the face of the waters.
- c) God creates a firmament in the midst of the waters. He creates leviathan 'to play therein' (Psalms 104:26).
- d) . . . e) When God divides the sea, the heads of leviathan are broken into pieces (Psalms 74:14).
- f) God divides the waters (into those below and those above).
- g) The lower waters are gathered together, and dry land (earth) appears.

**D: FINNISH**

- a) There was sea and an air-spirit, a *luonnatar* ('nature-daughter').
- b) The *luonnatar* enters the waves.
- c) The wind impregnates her and the sea 'makes her fat'. A water-bird, seeking a place to lay her eggs, makes a nest of the *luonnatar*'s knee.
- d) (The *luonnatar* later gives birth to Väinämöinen, who is responsible for the appearance of other divine beings.)
- e) The bird's seven eggs fall into the sea and break when the girl is disturbed by the intense heat that results from the brooding.
- f) An egg's lower half becomes the earth, the upper half the sky.
- g) The yolk and white become sun and moon, the mottled parts become clouds. The *luonnatar* gives shape and form to the earth.

**E: EVENK (ALTAIC)**

- a) In the beginning were only water [and two brothers] (Sym Evenk).
- b) The younger brother sends a duck into the depths to bring up some earth (Sym Evenk). The younger brother sends his older brother down (Chumikan Evenk). God sends 'man' to the bottom to bring up some mud (Tatar folktale).
- c) There were originally three worlds: two brothers worked in the middle world to create things (Ilempiya Evenk). In the beginning, when only the waters existed, God and 'man' swam in the form of geese (Tatar folktale).
- d) . . . e) The older brother becomes angry and tries to destroy the earth because it is too small for him (Sym Evenk). When 'man' has brought up the mud, he keeps some in his mouth, and this becomes marshland when spat out. God tells him he has sinned - this is the origin of good and evil (Tatar folktale).
- f) There were three worlds: two brothers lived in the upper and lower (Ilempiya Evenk). 'When the blue sky on high, and the sombre earth below were made, between the two were made the sons of men' (Palaeo-Turkic inscription from Orkhon, c. 700 CE).
- g) The retrieved earth is used to make the middle world (Chumikan Evenk).

Table 2

## A RECONSTRUCTED NOSTRATIC COSMOGONY

- a) There was only endless sea, and heat in the air above it.
- b) A formless, muddy mass arose from the waters.
- c) The mass was heated by the wind, and two creatures appeared in it.
- d) From them were born similar beings. These were the first gods.
- e) One creature killed the other. This was the first death.
- f) The dead creature was taken into the void and cut in pieces. The top part was used to make the sky. The lower part became the earth. Then they were propped apart, so that there was a space between them.
- g) The middle part was used to make everything else: sun and moon, mountains, trees, lakes, and rivers.

Table 3

This is the well-known 'earth-diver' type, which is also found among Indo-Pacific and Amerindian populations. Interestingly, it is also quite common in the Slavonic branch of IE [Eliade 1985: 35–6]. It also has an affinity with Uralic cosmogonies, exemplified here by the creation story from *Kalevala*. While it clearly differs significantly from the PIE and Semitic myths, and is also distinct from the Finnish one, there is also a broad structural similarity.

The Semitic and Finnish myths, especially the former, are structurally closer to the PIE. All begin with the union of elements not normally associated with beneficial mixing, and assert the primordial existence of water. All involve beings or objects that form in or emerge from that union. In each case a death (or breakage of a potential life form) must occur, and there is a separation of sky (upper) from earth (lower), followed by the fashioning of the earth or its features from the remainder. The exception is the Hebrew myth, although it may be that the figure of leviathan, while retained elsewhere, was lost from the original creation story as monotheistic Judaism evolved. Even the Altaic cosmogonies show enough anomalies – the brothers; the dualistic antagonism between them – to distinguish this particular variety of 'earth-diver'

tradition from those elsewhere, particularly as the Slavs share these anomalous elements.

There are enough structural and iconographic parallels between these three, backed up with motifs from the Altaic traditions, to enable a crude reconstruction of the hypothetical Nostratic cosmogony (table 3).

## A Global Myth?

This is a tentative reconstruction – and may well be wide of the mark, especially if the Eurasiatic family ultimately proves more robust than the Nostratic. But it demonstrates the structural similarities well enough, and suggests a former unity of conceptualisation. Even allowing for cultural exchange and occasional enforced religious changes, the pattern is encouraging. Reconstruction could be extended even further. The 'earth-diver' motif occurs throughout the Pacific islands, in Australasia, and in the Americas – where there is also a parallel to the IE theme of 'fire in water', in the shape of the Aztec creative principle of 'burning water' [Séjourné 1957: 99ff]. Chinese myth tells how the cosmos was created from the body of the primordial giant Pan-Gu [Yuan Ke 1993: 1–2].

African myths exhibit similar traits, although the body of individual myths has evidently been adapted to suit local concerns. Twins feature in the

creation myths of the Dogon (Mali) and Fon (Benin).

According to the former, the creator god Amma threw some clay into space, and it spread out in the shape of a human body; the latter believe the cosmos to consist of two separated hemispheres, like a split gourd. The Yoruba (Nigeria) believe that the earth was originally a watery marshland until some soil was thrown on it and scattered about by a pigeon and a hen [Parrinder 1982: 21–4]. Reconstruction of global proto-myths may yet prove possible.

It should be stressed that the PIE and Semitic myths given here are of proven antiquity, and are to some extent fossilised remnants of very old cosmological systems. The prevalence of Judaeo-Christian-Islamic religions, and the entrenched persistence of Hinduism and Buddhism, has allowed them to remain almost unchanged in Afro-Asiatic and IE-speaking populations by virtue of the single fact that they are enshrined in sacred texts. As holy scriptures they are less subject to change than oral traditions, the sole mode of transmission for the mythic traditions of most of the rest of the world. It may be that the oral traditions represented here are radically different from their forms of two thousand and more years ago.

## Notes

[1] S.H. Hooke exemplifies the dichotomies inherent in the field. He adopts what is essentially a comparativist approach, but stresses his diffusionist allegiance [Hooke 1963: 16–17]. Helmer Ringgren presents parallel studies of three branches of tradition in the region – including the Judaic religion – but prefaces his work with the remark that it 'should not take the form of an unplanned search for parallels to Old Testament usages and ideas, but that the ideas of the Ancient Near East should be



studied in the context of their function and of the culture to which they belong' [Ringgren 1973: ix].

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# THE GURAMOOQUE

## Near-forgotten survival of the God of the Otherworld in East Waterford

GREG FEWER graduated from University College Cork in 1989 with a BA in archaeology and history, and in 1993 with an MA in Irish history. Now a freelance archaeologist and historian, he also teaches Local Archaeology at Waterford Institute of Technology in Ireland.

At a point along the coast of the eastern part of County Waterford, in south-eastern Ireland, there is a body of water divided into two parts by a long eastward-extending sand spit. That part of the body of water to the south of the spit is called Tramore Bay and takes its name - Trá Mór or 'Great Strand' - from the long sandy beach created by the spit (see photographs overleaf). To the north is the almost entirely enclosed Back Strand, an area of extensive sand banks which are exposed at low tide. The sand spit is covered by dunes along its eastern half, some of which are quite high (the highest rises to 26 metres). Though uninhabited today, traces of prehistoric occupation can still be seen in the form of shell middens and low mounds, the latter now much obscured by shifting sand and by modern conservation measures carried out to prevent the spit from turning into an island due to erosion.<sup>[1]</sup>

During a recent field trip to Tramore, a popular resort town that exists at the western end of the spit, the students on my local archaeology course and myself ended the day with a drink in a local pub known as the Victoria House. While there, I picked up a leaflet which recounts a tale of *An Gormog* and gives details of the current "pub grub" menu and wine list. From a previous reading of Canon Patrick Power's *The Place-Names of Decies* (an important work on the toponymy of County Waterford),<sup>2</sup> I recognised the name *Gormog* straight away.

Power's book refers to a sub-denomination of the townland of Tramore Burrow (i.e., the sand

spit) as *Garrardhe an Ghormógaigh* ("Gormog's Garden"), explaining that 'Gormog, or Gormogach, is a spirit which haunts the desolate sand wastes'. He adds nothing else about this "spirit", and although it was an intriguing reference, the only other published account of the 'Gormog' I had previously seen was a paragraph drawing on some local folklore in a book by my uncle Michael Fewer who specialises in writing about long distance walks in Ireland.<sup>3</sup> The Victoria House leaflet/menu sports a drawing of the pub on the front page along with a paragraph relating the tale of *An Gormog*, which, in this particular case, is claimed to be the ghost of a corrupt

coast guard officer who perished with his horse in quicksand while attempting to escape a fellow officer that had disturbed him in his smuggling activities. Only 'on rare occasions' (we are told) does he re-appear 'as a gruesome, muddy spectre known to locals as the Gormog'. Unfortunately, no source is supplied for the tale.

I was a little sceptical that this was an accurate representation of the 'Gormog', whose name suggested to me something more ancient than that of a mere coast guard, and the folkloric accounts briefly summarised by my uncle supported this scepticism. It was only when I subsequently carried out some research on the same manuscript collection of Co. Waterford folklore that my uncle had used (and which is now available on microfilm in Waterford City Library), that I was to find a different story. This material had been collected by local schoolchildren for the Irish Folklore Commission in the 1930s and the original manuscripts are maintained in the Department of Irish Folklore at University College Dublin.<sup>4</sup> Far from being a mere spirit or ghost, the 'Gormog' appears to be a localised variant of the Otherworld-god of Irish mythology known variously as Donn, the Dagda or Manannán. I was amazed by the late survival of any tradition relating to an ancient deity in an area

where the earliest figures in folklore tend to be the local patron saint who lived in the early Christian period (5th-12th centuries AD). In this article, I report on the recorded details of the Guramooguck and show how he can be identified with the Otherworld-god.

## The Guramooguck's name and the Otherworld-god

In these folkloric accounts, of which there are only a handful, the 'Gormog' is usually called the Guramooguck (or Goramooguk, Goramooguh, Guramoogach and Gormoogie), though in one case it is referred to as the Gullamugee. Various attributes of the Guramooguck are here compared with those of the Otherworld-god who appears primarily in three separate forms - the Dagda (ancestor-deity of the Irish), Donn (lord of the dead) and Manannán (god of the sea). Although these individuals are often treated as separate gods, they are rather to be regarded as separate identities of the same deity.<sup>5</sup> As will become clear, the Guramooguck and the Otherworld-god are one and the same being. Indeed, if the anglicised spelling of the Guramooguck's name can be (here tentatively) identified as 'gor an múchadh' (gor = 'heat, warm'; múch = 'smother, suffocate, quench, extinguish [also 'fumes, suffocating vapour']'), then it may represent a divine epithet<sup>6</sup> meaning 'the suffocating heat' rather than a personal name.<sup>7</sup> One of the Dagda's alternative names was Áed Álainn (áed = 'fire'; álainn = 'beautiful') which points him out as none other than the sun-god,<sup>8</sup> thereby explaining the relevance of 'suffocating heat' as an epithet. It is interesting also that a ruined early Christian church located just outside a village only five miles east of Tramore Bay was named Killea (Cill Áed). Although Áed was



Tramore Burrow from the south-east with Tramore Bay on the left. Photograph taken c.1986; the lagoon in the foreground has long since silted up. Photographs by Greg Fewer.

the most popular male name in early and medieval Ireland, no saint bearing the name could be positively identified as the church's founder in a recent study.<sup>9</sup> Is it possible, then, that the church was actually named after the Dagda (though euphemised into a local hero or holy man in the Christianisation process)? The diocesan monastery of Killaloe, County Clare, was supposedly founded by a saint known as Molua (the 'Mo-' prefix is equivalent to the word 'dear' and was commonly added to the names of saints as a term of affection) but whose real identity was the god Lug (Lugaid).<sup>10</sup>

## The Guramooguck's attributes in local folklore

The Guramooguck is either described as an 'enchanted gentleman'<sup>11</sup> or as a 'phantom [...] dressed in armour [and] on horseback'<sup>12</sup>. The sand hills in Tramore Burrow are generally described as his residence (in one case called a 'palace'),<sup>13</sup> which is more particularly situated in a

"garden" amongst the dunes<sup>14</sup>. The association of the Guramooguck with substantial sand dunes is similar to the folkloric belief that the Dagda lived beneath hills (including such burial tumuli as Newgrange).<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere, he is said to live beneath the sea and only comes ashore at Tramore Burrow during the night.<sup>16</sup> Prior to the construction of his 'palace', according to one tale, the Guramooguck had buried some gold in a townland 2 km further north but adjacent to the Back Strand.<sup>17</sup> In this particular case, we may be seeing the blending of two distinct local folkloric elements - tales about the Guramooguck on the one hand and of the almost ubiquitous stories about buried treasure on the other. When the Guramooguck appears, either riding a white horse across the strand or resting upon the third wave out from the shore, he is soon followed by a storm.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, we are seeing here the Otherworld-god's attribute as god of lightning and thunder.<sup>19</sup> However, one tradition warns that anyone who sees the Guramooguck is said to 'die within the year' - a hint that the Guramooguck is the god of the dead (i.e., the Otherworld-god in



Tramore Burrow from the north-east with the Back Strand at low tide. The Guramooguck's cow was said to have crossed the strait from the sand spit to graze in the fields near the eastern shore of the strand.

the guise of Donn).<sup>20</sup>

His horse is either described as a 'fairy horse' or simply as a 'white horse', which in one tale was mistaken for a grey mare and ridden briefly by a mortal man. In this tale, the horse 'went as fast as the wind across the strand and around the burrow [i.e., the sand spit] and brought [the man] back to the same spot again' (on the east shore of the Back Strand) before disappearing.<sup>21</sup> A story about a white sea-horse that came ashore at an adjacent headland to graze in a field and which evaded attempts to capture it may be a variant of the same creature.<sup>22</sup> T. F. O'Rahilly points out that the Otherworld-god is sometimes represented in the early manuscript tradition by 'a man riding a horse or accompanied by a horse'. The Otherworld-god, in the identity of Manannán, in particular, possessed 'a horse that could travel over sea and land', or that he rode 'through the waves on horseback'. In one tale, 'the lord of an insular Otherworld' bore the name *Riangabair*, meaning 'sea-horse'.<sup>23</sup>

The Guramooguck is also accompanied by a cow, in one case stated to be a 'nice small black cow [that] grazes among

the sand hills of the Burrow'. This cow bears three magical properties. Firstly, it is uncatchable by humans. It also carries an 'unspendable' shilling in her ear (or in a purse in her left ear) which always returns to the cow if it is ever taken from her. Occasionally, the cow crosses the Back Strand to graze among other cows whose milk is said to be more plentiful as a consequence of their being in her company.<sup>24</sup> This cow could be a variation on the Otherworld-god's form as a bull (called *Dam Ruí*, or *Dáire Donn* as in the mythological tale, the *Táin Bó Cualnge*) suggested by T. F. O'Rahilly.<sup>25</sup>

## The Guramooguck as the Otherworld-god

As is apparent from the Guramooguck's attributes and his association with a supernatural horse and cow, we have here the remnants of a belief in one of the most important pre-Christian deities of the Irish. That the Guramooguck appears to represent a localisation of the god Donn/the Dagda/Manannán is not unusual. This fate befell other widespread Celtic deities

such as \**Maponos* (Irish *Mac ind Óc*; Welsh *Mabon*), the material evidence for whose cult is largely confined to northern Britain.<sup>26</sup> A localised deity is quite distinct from a local god whose cult might only be known from a place-name,<sup>27</sup> and whose attributes may have been tied to matters of importance only to the locality where he or she was worshipped.

In particular, the Guramooguck is best associated with the Otherworld-god's representation as Donn, lord of the dead, whose Otherworld realm was associated with an island off the south-west coast of Ireland known as Tech Duinn (or Teach Doinn [= Donn's House]). The maritime abode, and Donn's widespread association in modern Irish folklore with shipwrecks, crops, cattle and sea-storms<sup>28</sup> is evident in the Guramooguck's case. Moreover, one localised variant of the deity, Donn Dumaige (Donn of Dumach), 'was believed to reside in the sand-hills of Dough More, to the north of Doonbeg, Co. Clare', a location topographically identical to Tramore Burrow.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion: The value of preserving folklore

That stories about an early pagan deity survived into the twentieth century in an area only ten miles from a city (Waterford) and beside a small town is remarkable, especially as most of the supernatural folklore of the district relates more to straightforward ghosts (of comparatively recent origin), fairies, saints and magical cures. However, though some people living near the Back Strand or Tramore Bay today dimly recall stories about the Guramooguck told to them in their childhood, interest in maintaining the tradition for future generations does not appear to be very strong. Furthermore, as can be seen in the case of the Victoria House leaflet, there is a danger that unrelated tales may accrete to, or completely supplant, the

original, masking the true identity of this localised Irish deity.

This situation is not unlike the threat of destruction or alteration posed by developers to many archaeological sites. Indeed, the loss or even garbling of local folklore is much to be regretted since the archaeological interpretation of some ancient monuments can be enriched by its study. Moreover, the value of preserving archaeological sites is, in my view, somewhat diminished if no effort is also made to record the folklore associated with them. Of course, folklore relating to a prehistoric site does not usually originate in the time when the monument was built. Nevertheless, it does reveal something about what people from medieval times onwards believed about such monuments and how these fitted into their own ritual landscape. Even when no archaeological site is involved, as in the case of the Guramooguck, recording the folklore of a district will aid in understanding the place that sand dunes and other natural features had in the historic landscape and also add information about regional differences in early pre-Christian beliefs.

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- 11: Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin, Ms. S 652, pp.21 and 149.
- 12: Ms. S 651, p.113.
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- 28: Ronan Coghlan (1985) *Pocket dictionary of Irish myth and legend* (Belfast: Appletree Press), p.27. Ironically, a military transport bearing the name *The Sea-Horse*(!) and filled with troops and their families returning home from the Napoleonic wars was wrecked in Tramore Bay in January 1816 with the loss of 363 lives. Many of the dead washed up on shore along the sand spit and most of them were buried in a mass grave on the beach. The officers, however, were buried further inland in an Anglican churchyard. See Fewer, 'Why the Tramore sand hills should be protected from development', op. cit.
- 29: O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, p.484 (note 2). Tramore Burrow was originally known as Duagh More (Dumhach Mór means 'Great Dune') as indicated by the mid-seventeenth-century Down Survey of Ireland (see 'The Down Survey maps of Co. Waterford. Part Two. The Barony of Middlethird', in *Decies* 45 (1992), pp.13-33 (pp.15-17).



# HEARING IS BELIEVING



RICHARD THORN is a broadcaster and lecturer in Social Anthropology and audio-visual production. His most recent academic interest is to look comparatively at the ways in which different societies regard sound, and how their acoustic environment contextualises their relationships with each other and with the natural world. He has worked as a freelance producer-presenter in radio for 16 years, mainly at BBC Radio Bristol.

This article is based on the key note speech given at the Hearing is Believing conference, University of Sunderland on 2nd March 1996.

**What kind of reality would it be, virtual or otherwise, which would deny the essence of the acoustic spaces within which we all live? The problem is that 'Hearing is Believing' owes its impact, in a culture which values the visual over the aural, to our 'knowing' that, really, it's seeing that's believing. But is it conceivable that hearing could literally be taken to be believing?**

Not only is it conceivable, it is the daily reality of life on the Great Papuan Plateau of Papua New Guinea, home of the Kaluli, and not too far away the Umeda and the Foi.

## Sound versus vision

A specific concern of mine is the western cultural bias in favour of the visual. Over the past year, I have been looking at what anthropologists and others have had to say about the cultural meanings of sound - apart from music, and especially in everyday rather than ritual contexts. What I have found has excited me, and confirmed my belief in the contribution anthropology has to make to the debates yet to be held about new directions for the media.

Key works among ethnographies are Steven Feld's *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*, and Paul Stoller's *The Taste of*

*Ethnographic Things*. They contrast the western under-rating of the sense of hearing with its importance in Kaluli and Songhay culture respectively. Then there is a most important contribution by Alfred Gell in a new book on the anthropology of landscape, in which he describes the acoustic world of the Umeda, like the Kaluli, of Papua New Guinea.

*The Ranking of the Senses* (Synnott 1993) shows how the senses have not been ranked equally by cultures. The ranking in the western tradition puts sight at the top, with hearing trailing behind. 'The dominant communication systems in preliterate societies were the proximity sense: oral-aural, in face-to-face interaction. Humanity lived (and still does live) in 'acoustic space'. But with the invention of the alphabet and writing . . . the balance of the sensorium began to shift' [Synnott 1993: 210]

Classen quotes the case of the Suyu of the Brazilian Matto Grosso who 'deem keen hearing to be the mark of the fully socialised individual. The Suyu term "to hear" . . . also means to understand, while the expression "it is in my ear" is used by the Suyu to indicate that they have learned something, even something visual such as a weaving pattern. Sight, in fact, is considered by the Suyu to be an anti-social sense, cultivated only by witches.' (Classen 1993: 9)

Feld, writing about the Kaluli, and Gell about the Umeda, make it clear that sound cannot be omitted from any attempt to understand the nature of knowledge. Gell talks about his own 'methodological deafness' which caused him to fail to appreciate, during his fieldwork in Umeda, 'the auditory domain, including natural sounds, language and song, as cultural systems in their own right, and not just adjuncts to culture at large, but as foundations, thematic at every level of cultural experience.' (Feld 1995: 233)

Stoller compares the virtual ignoring of the dimension of sound by Western thinkers with the ethnographic observation that 'taste, smell and hearing are often more important for the Songhay than sight, the privileged sense of the West. In Songhay one can taste kinship, smell witches, and hear the ancestors. . . .' (Stoller 1989 :5). Songhay use senses other than sight to categorize their sociocultural experience. If anthropologists are to produce knowledge, how can they ignore

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how their own sensual biases affect the information they produce. (ibid.: 7) '[Sound is] . . . a foundation of experience . . . A deeper appreciation of sound could force us to overturn our static, spatialized world and consider the dynamic nature of sound, an open door to the comprehension of cultural sentiment.' (ibid.: 103)

Feld shows how the Kaluli, who live just north of Mt Bosavi in Papua New Guinea, totally incorporate bird song into the expression of core values of their culture, so that 'an analysis of modes and codes of sound communication leads to an understanding of the ethos and quality of [their] life. . . . Kaluli sound expressions are revealed as embodiments of deeply felt sentiments.' (Feld 1990: 3)

## Aural maps

The 'soundscape' characteristic of any particular set of cultural and geographic circumstances, produces "the foundation of experience" for those whose whole way of life is built on that foundation, not just the narrowly auditory bits. So what consequences can we expect when individuals move between quite different acoustic environments, or those environments themselves are subject to massive change? Jackson, in a paper on the use of sound in ritual, discusses ' . . . the meaning and use of sounds in human society generally.' In ritual, he says sound 'provides a frame and a marked off time or

place that alerts a special kind of expectancy. . . . Of all physical stimuli sound is an ideal marker, it is pervasive and far-reaching yet capable of infinite variation' by contrast to sight (Jackson 1968: 295).

But is this 'marking' function of sound confined to ritual? I've been using a questionnaire, so far only with students, designed by Gary Ferrington of the University of Oregon to elicit the level of awareness of sound in people's everyday lives, and identify the range of meaning sounds have for them. The associations of sounds made by my respondents accomplish precisely this 'marking off' in everyday life, constituting a largely unremarked part of our

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soundscape - for example, the sound of 'dad's razor being scraped night and morning, giving me a sense of security', 'the sound of the key in the front-door meaning dad was home and everything was all right', or 'the sound of family moving about the house after I'd gone to bed giving me a sense of security and belonging'.

These references to notions of security are but one example of the deeply emotional and personal associations that respondents were producing in answer to Ferrington's five very basic questions:

1: Identify two or three dominating soundmarks in in your life (a) as a child (b) as an adult.

2: Identify two or three sounds in the acoustical environment that you vividly recall from your childhood. Explain the emotional attachment you connect to these sounds.

3: How would you describe the term noise as it applies to

the acoustical ecology of your world?

4: What is your favorite soundscape? In other words, where is your favorite place in the natural acoustical environment?

5: Identify the type of community in which you lived (a) Age 1-6 (b) Age 6-13 (c) Age 13-18 and the soundscape generated by living organisms within that community. (Ferrington 1995).

Giving this questionnaire first to highly visually oriented Graphic Design students I imagined it would not hold their attention for more than 10 minutes at the most. In the event, I had to stop them writing after 45 minutes. There were similar reactions from groups of Time-Based Media students. The questionnaire triggered a level of response which suggests to me it would be rewarding to set up further activities to encourage the exploration of, and reflection on, this culturally under-rated sensory area.

For example, there is that question of the relative reliability we ascribe to aural information compared to visual. Gell describes the harrowing experience of an Umeda informant who had been chased down a path by an ogre. "Yes, yes," I said, cutting him off, "but did you actually see the ogre?" My informant looked at me in perplexity. "It was dark, I was running away, it was there on the path, going hu-hu-hu" . . . When, I wondered, was an Umeda going to admit to actually seeing one of these monsters? But that, of course, was a misapprehension bred of a visually based notion of the real. For Umeda, hearing is believing, and the Umeda really do hear ogres.' (Gell 1995: 239)

If ethnographers have largely ignored the acoustic environments within which they have been working, because of what Gell called 'methodological deafness', it remains true that, except for the extraordinary circumstances of a 'dead' sound studio or being profoundly deaf,

all human experience is contextualised in a 'soundscape' (Schafer 1994). Most ethnographies begin with a description of the landscape, none describes the soundscape.

Recent reports suggest a growing concern with noise pollution in the UK, and a number of extreme reactions to it. *The Guardian* (28th Sept 1995) reported that 'Domestic noise has become the most common complaint received by local authority officers, leading to at least 17 killings and suicides in the past three years.'

## Aural boundaries

Apart from the general aural context of all social behaviour, how might a consideration of sound bear upon any particular theoretical topic, which might then influence the ideas of, say, a sound producer?

Cohen's *Symbolising Boundaries* considers the construction of identity in a number of communities in Britain. In one chapter Bouquet focusses on the kitchen when writing about the partitioning of status and identity in relation to a woman and her mother-in-law. My respondents recall: 'Mum singing in the kitchen; mother cooking in the kitchen with Radio 4 *Woman's Hour*; not just her voice, but the background sounds of domestic activities.'

Mewett, writing about a Lewis crofting community as 'constructed and constituted by the actors' states that his 'concern is to understand 'community' through the stock of knowledge people use to inform and guide everyday behaviour . . . how boundaries are constructed as part of the shared meanings of everyday behaviour and within the context of the social relationships of everyday life.' (in Cohen 1986: 72)

As my informants indicate, such boundaries, when marked aurally, may be temporal 'varied music playing throughout the day - classical at the dinner table: it's not just the music that stands out but the sound of the

needle on vinyl and the smell of acetate discs; generator in the garage charging up in the morning; father's razor scraping morning and evening; mother calling me every morning at 8; dad banging his pipe on the bin at particular times of day, Playschool, TV theme tunes, phone late at night meaning trouble/problems.'

Such boundaries may be associated with persons. 'Different members of the family running up the stairs; the thump of my mother's heartbeat as I sat on her knee with my head against her chest; my little fake piano when my brother tried to play it with all his fingers; my father clearing his throat when concentrating; dad slurping his cornflakes when he used hot milk in the winter.'

Such boundaries may be spatial. 'From my bedroom the sound of voices and till in our shop; the Aga lid being put down; the distinctive signature of the different streams in our village; Mrs Mepstead's dog barking; from in a terrace house, the sound of the neighbours' clock chiming every hour on the one side, and the family arguing on the other.'

One particularly interesting example of aural boundary setting between households came from the respondent who noted, over three occasions in her life when she had moved house, the changes in the thickness of the house walls and the corresponding raising or lowering in the threshold of audibility of neighbours' talking.

## Sound as taxonomy and ways of knowing

In addition to the question of the 'foundation of experience', aural or otherwise, there is that of the organisation of knowledge. The anthropologist Maurice Bloch (1992) argues that the very act of writing down people's knowledge in sentences in books and articles, totally misrepresents its nature.

'Anthropological accounts . . . work from a false theory of



cognition. As a result, when they attempt to represent the way the people studied conceptualise their society, they do so in terms which do not match the way any human beings conceptualise anything fundamental and familiar in any society or culture' (ibid: 127) 'Everyday thought,' he says, 'is not "language-like", . . . it does not involve linking propositions in a single sequence . . . Rather it relies on clumped networks of signification which require that they be organised in ways which are not lineal but multi-stranded.' (ibid: 128) This view certainly accommodates the kinds of associations of sounds with information exhibited by my respondents.

One of Bloch's informants in Madagascar, whilst out walking made a swift assessment of the farming potential of a stretch of land they were passing as 'good swidden', and Bloch saw his judgement as based on

'... a fairly clear yet supple mental model, perhaps we could say a script, stored in long-term memory, of what a "good swidden" is like: . . . this model . . . is partly visual, partly analytical . . . partly welded to a series of procedures . . .' (Bloch 1991: 187)

If he had been talking about the Kaluli landscape, it would certainly include an aural element. In contrast to language-based taxonomies, Feld demonstrates that Kaluli avian taxonomy is grounded in sound. Theirs is 'a set of beliefs

that organises the interpretation of everyday living in a world that is full of birds and alive with their sounds. Myths, seasons, colors, gender, taboos, curses, spells, time, space, and naming are all systematically patterned; all of these are grounded in the perception of birds, as indicated foremost by the presence of sound.' (Feld 1994: 83-84)

## To you they are birds, to me they are voices in the forest

In a chapter suggestively entitled 'To you they are birds, to me they are voices in the forest', Feld describes how 'Kaluli categorize and think about routine experiences of birds most often and most thoroughly in terms of the sounds they hear in the forest and at the village edges. Recognition of birds by sound is immediate in everyday situations . . . Evidence for dominance of the routinely shared character of sound over image categories is manifest in a number of different ways. When presented with pictures or specimens out of context Kaluli tend first to think of and imitate the sound, then to say the name of the bird. . . . Virtually all Kaluli men can sit down in front of a tape recorder and imitate the sounds of at least one hundred birds, but few can provide visual descriptive information on nearly that many.' (ibid.: 72)

Gell goes so far as to claim a link between the Umeda landscape, and their mode of perception, cognition, language, and sentiment. For him 'the primary rainforest environment imposes a reorganization of sensibility, such that the world is perceived in a manner which gives pride of place to the auditory sense (and another sense we hardly use, olfaction - see Gell 1977), and that this transformed sensibility has manifold consequences in the

domain of cognition' (Gell 1995: 235)

Furthermore, Gell suggests that 'The value systems of New Guinea "forest" cultures seem to emphasise sentiment . . . more than the cultures of the open plains . . . Here, in the vibrant, tactile, scented gloom is the landscape of nostalgia and abandonment . . . . Hearing is (relatively) intimate, concrete, and tactile, whereas vision promotes abstraction.' (op. cit.)

Feld talks about a concept of sound, *dulugu ganalan* or 'lift-up-over-sounding', which has enormous potential for anyone considering using sound in any way other than the most mundane accompaniment to pictures. 'Unison or discretely bounded sounds do not appear in nature; all sounds are dense, multi-layered, overlapping, alternating, and inter-locking. The constantly changing figure and ground of this spatio-acoustic mosaic is a 'lift-up-over-sounding' texture without gaps, pauses or breaks.' (op. cit.)

In a recent paper Feld coins the term 'acoustemology' - an ellision of 'acoustic' and 'epistemology' - to describe his concern with 'acoustic knowing as a centrepiece of Kaluli experience: how sounding and the sensual, bodily, experiencing of sound is a special kind of knowing, or put differently, how sonic sensibility is basic to experiential truth in the Bosavi forests. Just as 'life takes place' so does sound; thus more and more my experiential accounts of the Kaluli sound world have become acoustic studies of how senses make place and places make sense.' (Feld 1994:6)

## Quiet/Silence

The commonsense definition of both 'quiet' and 'silence' may be absence of sound, but reflection makes it clear that neither term can refer to the total absence of sound, but rather to the absence of noise. 'Quiet' is often associated with 'peace' - not necessarily by contrast to war, but certainly by



contrast to an involuntary involvement in activity. The total absence of sound is a virtually unnatural phenomenon, to be found only in the anechoic area of a sound studio, so perhaps silence is better thought of as the absence of chatter, or any foregrounded, attention-demanding sound. In such a silence we may, for instance, become aware of our own sound-making - breathing, say, or footsteps.

A sociologist who points up differences in Eastern and Western notions of silence is Keiko Torigoe of the Sacred Heart University in Tokyo. She quotes the guidelines for a contest run in the Nerima district of Tokyo in 1990: 'Just as we have our own favourite places where we enjoy beautiful scenery, each of us must have a place where he or she finds his or her own special silence. Please let us know about the places where you enjoy your favourite scenery of silence. Where in Nerima Ward have you found this silence?' (Torigoe 1994: 6)

One aim of the contest organisers was to understand 'the meaning and substance of 'silence' and to approach 'the acoustic environment from the viewpoint of silence rather than that of noise' (ibid.). As Torigoe says, 'in Japan we define silence rather differently from the western understanding of it as the absence of sound' (ibid.). The contest, indeed,



'established that all silences are not the same and that silence can exist in various ways as appreciated by the residents of Nerima Ward. The sound level meter is not the only way to understand silence.' (ibid.: 7)

Here are two examples from the ten kinds of silent place identified in Nerima Ward.

**The precinct of Chyoumei Temple.** This silence was termed 'The Silence of Shrines and Temples'. The entrant who chose this place was a seventy year old man who made his own tanka (a short poem) to describe it: In the grounds Of Chyoumei Temple Nothing but the cry Of a summer bird Interrupts the silence

**The Sanpouji Pond in Syakujii Park.** This silence was termed 'The Silence of Plentiful Water' and was described by one of the entrants this way: 'The heroes of this space are water, birds, insects and the sound of the wind.' In fact, when Terigoe visited it, she was 'surrounded by a surprising variety of natural sounds, such as the water birds flapping their wings and the sound of running spring water.'

As Feld argued with regard to the Kaluli soundscape, these people are not exclusively responding to isolated sounds - sounds of something - and their appreciations are not of individual sounds, and only partly sounds in relation to other sounds.

Their perceptions are of a complex whole, which includes the space in which the sounds occur, an acoustic space which is shaped by a unique configuration of the landscape in each case - a hill, a dip, a grove of trees, the bend of a river, an expanse of water. For Torigoe, 'Silence . . . exists as a synesthesia comprising our total sensations.' For her the contest 'worked as a new type of socio-audio performance art . . . [which can] make people conscious about what seems natural to them, or to reveal something important in their daily lives . . . When it comes to Sound Culture we have to consider not only the sounds we create or we hear, but also

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## We should make much more use of descriptions of how things look, sound, feel and taste.

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the sounds of which we are not conscious, or which we think we do not or cannot hear. Sounds of the past, sounds of the future, sounds in our memories and dreams - all these kinds of sounds should be included.' (op. cit.)

The poetry entailed in such a formulation, suggests a fruitful possibility for experimental work - not, initially, for 'making programmes' so much as for providing the occasion and validation for exercises in valuing the soundscape, such as were provided by the Nerima Silent Places Contest.

In a brief introduction to Japanese ideas about sound, Imada points to the suggestive force of the absence of discernible sound, through two illustrations. The first, is of people gathering to listen to the sound of the bloom of a lotus flower at a pond in Tokyo. The blooming actually occurs at a pitch below the level of human hearing, but people 'wanted to listen to that phantom sound.

The experience was a kind of communal auditory hallucination.' (Imada 1994: 5) Perhaps it was a matter of drawing upon things inside themselves rather than responding to external stimuli.

Secondly, in describing a sound installation in a garden, Imada draws attention to the delay between water being introduced to the *suikinkutsu*<sup>1</sup> and its effect being heard. He says that not only did people 'appreciate the sound of the *suikinkutsu* itself, but also the time spent creating the sound.' The delay 'had the effect of directing [their] listening to other environmental sounds in the garden' (op. cit.) The idea of pleasure in delay sits strangely in contemporary western culture. No wonder Imada describes the nature of sound as being in accord with the most fundamental and intuitive principles of a culture.

The ethnographic accounts of Feld, Stoller and Gell suggest ways of thinking about and through sound that are of potential importance to students whose professional interest nowadays must be about ideas as much as technology; who should not allow themselves to be limited by the taken-for-granted assumptions of what constitute human sensory boundaries; whose brief must be international rather than local; for whom old structures both of the media industry and of the production process have largely disintegrated.

On the one hand, the next generation of producers and consumers are being raised in a visually dominated culture. On the other hand, the Kaluli and the Umeda of Papua New Guinea remind us of the acoustic and cognitive spaces from which we have excluded ourselves. The crux of the Umeda ogre episode was not whether on this particular occasion a man had been pursued by an ogre, but what constitutes evidence for the existence of ogres in principle.

Anthropology shows that belief systems are systems, that



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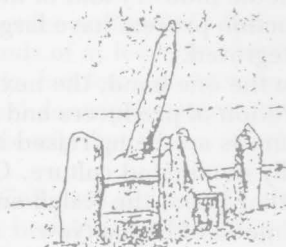
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is, they are structured, and that structure implicates the aural as much as the visual. Furthermore, in giving people access to other belief systems, we should, as Bloch says, 'make much more use of descriptions of how things look, sound, feel, taste' (1991: 193)

## Notes

1: *Suikinkutsu* are sound installations found in Japanese-style gardens from the end of the Edo Period (1603-1867) to the early Showa period. *Sui* is equivalent to 'water'; *kin* is the Japanese zither; *kitsu* means 'cave'.

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# Sounding the Landscape

*BOB DICKINSON is a music lecturer and composer who has been interested in landscape and 'earth mysteries' since the 1980s and currently spends most of his free time rock climbing and surfing. At one time he was editing Markstone, an earth mysteries magazine for Lincolnshire. This article is based on a chapter in his forthcoming book to be published by Capall Bann.*

**The power of natural forces to produce sound has long been recognised as possessing a mysterious significance that lies beyond the immediate aural experience. From the county of Lincolnshire we come across examples of natural sounds described as either being portentous of some future event or as voices that are heard originating from some otherworldly realm. In the village of Digby it is said to be a sign of rain when the wind is in Kelby Hole. From Gunthorpe on the banks of the Trent originates the phenomenon of the 'Death Songs':**

'... caused by a dry reed vibrating with the wind. If several reeds are vibrating at the same time on different notes the sound at night is mournful and eerie. In winter-time scarcely a mile of the riverside is free from this occasional dirge. It was said to be a death-dirge for some loved one; it was the common belief that 'someone was calling'. (Rudkin 1936)

Commenting on the acoustic phenomenon associated with the Organ Mountains of Rio Janeiro, one writer has observed:

'It is not only the aspect of these pointed summits that reminds the spectator of the sublime instrument of our churches; the strange sounds which escape from between these cylinders of rock render the analogy still more striking and complete the illusion. The voice of the tempest, the lamentations of the forests bowed by the passing winds,

the doleful wails of the jaguars, the cries of the howling monkeys passing between these sonorous peaks, produce a harmony before which all human instrumentation loses its grandeur.' (Mangin n.d.)

From the act of identifying such natural sound forces and imbuing them with meaning it was only a small step for man to devise ritual acts and instruments that enabled him to commune in and with the landscape through sound. Two such methods can be identified: firstly, humanly produced sound interacting with the landscape; secondly, specially created instruments activated by natural forces to produce sound. The manifestations of such methods can be identified in ritual acts dating back many millennia to more recent practice involving musicians improvising both in and in response to the landscape. The dividing line between these two areas of activity appears to be very

narrow as both share the common ground of 'sounding the landscape', it is only the tools of sound production which sometimes vary.

## Singing up the land

The 'Songlines' of the Australian Aborigines provide us with a still-extant tradition perpetuated for thousands of years. These 'lines' are ancient and invisible tracks crossing the land with associated songs which describe its creation. The Aborigine 'sings the world into existence' as he ritually travels these paths. The Land itself becomes the musical score with each rock, creek and stretch of gravel being sung. As Bruce Chatwin writes in his book, *The Songlines*:

'I'll be driving my "old men" through the desert, and we'll come to a ridge of sandhills, and suddenly they'll all start singing. "What are you mob singing?", I'll ask, and they'll say: "Singing up the country boss, makes the country come up quicker."' (Chatwin 1987)

Gary Snyder describes his experience of the 'Songlines' whilst travelling by truck west out of Alice Springs in the company of a Pintubi tribal elder called Jimmy Tjungurrayi:

'We made camp at a waterhole called Ilpili and rendezvoused with a number of Pintubi people from surrounding desert country. The Ilpili waterhole is about a yard across, six inches deep, in a little swale of bush full of finch.

The people camp a quarter a mile away. It's the only waterhole that stays full through drought in several thousand square miles. A place kept by custom, I am told, welcome and open to all. Through the night, until one or two in the morning, Jimmy Tjungurrayi and the other old men sat and sang a cycle of journey songs, walking through a space of desert in imagination and song. They stopped between songs and would hum a phrase or two and then would argue a bit about the words and then would start again, and someone would defer to another person and would let him start. Jimmy explained to me that they have so many cycles of journey songs they can't quite remember them all, and that they have to be constantly rehearsing them. Night after night they say. 'What will we sing tonight?' 'Let's sing the walk up to Darwin.' They'll start out and argue their way along through it, and stop when it gets too late to go any farther. I asked Jimmy, "Well how far did you get last night?" He said, "Well we got two-thirds of the way to Darwin." This is a way to transmit information about vast terrain which is obviously very effective, and doesn't require writing. Some of the places thus defined will also be presented as sacred.' (Snyder 1984)

Reference was made earlier to the songs describing that primal moment when the landscape and its features were first created, that mythical time in Aborigine tradition known as 'The Dreaming'. James Cowan, in his *Mysteries of the Dream-Time*, gives several examples of songs describing the 'Dream Journey'. One of these connected with the Central Desert region inhabited by the Arunta tribe, describes a series of sacred sites marking the Dream Journey of Kolakola, the red kangaroo, as it moves over the land. This verse 'sings'

that place where Kolakola disappeared:

*I Kolakola, am hurrying on  
without delay;  
From my hollow, I am hurrying  
on without delay.  
I, the young kangaroo, am  
journeying  
a far journey without a halt;  
Leaving behind a thin trail I am  
journeying  
on a far journey without a halt.  
(Cowan 1989)*

## Song in the landscape of the British Isles

A Celtic parallel to the Aborigine 'songlines' may be embodied in the twelfth-century collection of Irish legends called 'The Lore of the Prominent Places' or 'Dindschencas'. This 'mythological geography' concerns the origin of local place-names and describes sacred trees planted by the gods as they travelled across the land. Caitlin Matthews commenting upon these 'place-name stories' has observed:

'Celtic Tradition reveals that deities and spirits, as well as mythic heroes, were associated with places. Land features, natural outcrops of rock, springs, wells and trees are the loci of these deities, not temples built by men. The Irish *dindschencas* (place-name stories) relate the topography of Ireland by association with deities and mythic peoples whose great deeds are remembered at particular spots and who gave their names to these loci. The British chroniclers, such as Nennius, reveal a very similar tradition. History is the land beneath our feet. The earth is sacred because it is deeply infused with mythic activity, invisible to mortal sight but perceptible to seers and story-tellers who, in Celtic Tradition, are the priests of the gods.' (Matthews 1989)

There are other examples in the folklore of the British Isles of folksong connected to both place and landscape features,

suggesting a lost tradition of mapping the land with song while highlighting its associated mythology. In some cases a song is transferred and adapted to a location as in the case of the widely distributed song, 'The Three Ravens', which had a local association with the village of Northorpe, Lincolnshire, dating back to the early nineteenth century. Printed sources from the mid-nineteenth century describe how a certain old farm labourer, Harry Richard, recalls hearing the song performed at sheep-clippings and harvest suppers when he was a young man. Richard believed that the tragedy alluded to in the song occurred in a local grass close adjoining the river Eau near a deep pool called the Slaughter Hole:

*There were three ravens in a  
tree  
As black as any jet could be.  
A down a derry down.  
Says the middlemost raven to  
his mate  
Where shall we go to get aught  
to eat?  
It's down in yonder grass green  
field,  
There lies a squire dead and  
killed,  
His horse all standing by his  
side,  
Thinking he'll get up and ride;  
His hounds all standing at his  
feet,  
Licking his wounds that run so  
deep.  
There comes a lady full of woe,  
As big wi' bairn as she can go:  
She lifted up the bloody head  
And kissed the lips that were so  
red.  
She laid her down all by his side  
And for the love of him she  
died.*

(Gutch and Peacock 1908)

Within the county of Lincolnshire there appears to have been a tradition amongst followers of the old pagan religion of referring to specific features of the local landscape in song. In Anglo-Saxon times the witch was called *haegtesa*

or 'hedge rider', because of her ability to traverse the mysterious 'hedge' dividing the worlds of the dead and the living. This power is referred to at a later date in 'The Witches Death Song' recorded in a nineteenth century collection of Lincolnshire folklore (Gutch and Peacock 1908). The story is recounted of how a wise woman, who had a familiar spirit in the shape of a magpie, when near death said, 'Is there a pig in the sty and the door shut? Then I will sing you the witches death song'. The first two verses of some twenty run as follows:

*When the Lord takes old  
women's senses,  
He takes them over dykes and  
fences,  
Straight away to heaven,  
When the Lord gives old  
women graces,  
They wear no more witches'  
faces.  
For the Lord takes them straight  
to heaven*

The most startling features of this song are the references to such localised features as 'dykes' and 'fences' which could be interpreted within the context of this description of spirit flight as being symbolic or actual landscape markers along the path which bridges the world of the living and the dead, the conscious and the unconscious: discrete points of 'cross-over' for the traditional witch (Dickinson 1993).

## Modern music in the landscape

Modern parallels to this 'singing of the land' are to be found in the work of many composers, artists and musicians working today. The English composer, Michael Finnissy, took an air flight over the Australian outback and the result was the orchestral piece, *Red Earth*, whose sounds correspond to the various landscape features observed [1]. Jim Hancock, sculptor, potter and environmental artist, has

responded to cartographic representations of the landscape by equating the varying contour line heights on a map to numbers in a computer which feeds back specific sounds and pitches. The resultant 'melody' is overlaid with a rhythm derived from the time taken to complete a journey on foot through the actual landscape represented on the map. Susan Elizabeth Hale, a singer and performance artist working in New Mexico, has undertaken a 'song journey' to sacred sites (Hale 1996) while her fellow countryman, Nicholas Collins, has written short verbal pieces, instructions for the performer to interact with the environment in a variety of ways:

'Use sound to map an environment. At each of several different locations within it record identifying sound or perform activities that articulate some distinguishing characteristic.' (Collins unpubl.)

A more subjective response to the landscape and elemental forces is to be found in the work of improvising musicians such as Paul Burwell, some of whose performances have taken place in a variety of outdoor spaces such as, in the case of this example, Newhaven Beach:

'Lying on the pebbles in the cold it became too dark to see but the drums pitted their sound against the sea, widening the space between the two. The chalk cliffs resonated making sounds rise and hover.' (Nicholson 1976)

This interaction between humanly-produced sound and the environment is found in other cultures. Take this description of the *Ceremonie de bienvenue* which is performed in monastic communities in mountainous Tibet:

'As soon as they glimpse the guest of honour they sound their enormous *dunchen* horns, whose deep bass tones reverberate in the steep, white heights of the mountain. The silent snow captures and amplifies the extension of the human voice as it rings out to welcome the guest.' [2]

A particularly beautiful example occurring in the work of a contemporary composer is to be found in the eighth of Pauline Oliveras, *Sonic Meditations* written in 1971 and entitled 'Environmental Dialogue for the New Hampshire Festival Orchestra':

'On Lake Winnepausaukee at sun up or sun down, players of the orchestra are dispersed heterogeneously in small boats all over the lake. Players begin by observing your own breathing. As you become aware of sounds in the environment, gradually begin to reinforce the pitch of the sound source or its resonance. If you become louder than the source, dimuendo until you can hear it again. If the source disappears listen quietly for another. If the source is intermittent your pitch reinforcement may be continuous until the source stops ...' [3]

Within my own performance and compositional work I have attempted to relate the occurrence of sounds to structures at a specific location. Some pieces have been performed in a ritual context at ancient sacred sites whose 'design' determines the nature of certain musical parameters. The second part of *Castlerigg Improvisation*, realised and performed at the stone circle bearing that name under the Lammas full moon in early August, 1990, requires the performer to walk around the perimeter of the circle at a steady pace without pausing. As each stone is encountered two pebbles are struck together producing a cyclical rhythm whose sounds and silences are determined by the spacing of these megalithic monoliths.

In this case the compositional act sees the rejection of neatly packaged New Age sound products replete with 'Gaia-isms' (= profit) in favour of a more honest process in tune with the environment, without an audience/consumer and excess. In the words of Suzanne Vega, just you, the performer, 'naked on the grass' [4].

The following 'pieces' develop some of the ideas presented in this article.

Treat them as 'open structures' for musical realisation or, even better, create your own pieces along similar lines.

### **Bay Listen**

To be performed in a bay surrounded by towering cliffs (for instance North Landing, Flamborough):

Strike two pebbles together.

Await the echo.

Move to a different location.

Compare the resultant echo.

Continue by finding different locations.

Mark each position by some visual means (such as a flag).

Retrace your steps.

Perform an ensemble version with your friends, each player having different coloured flags. Visit each others positions.

When it is time for you to leave take with you any signs of your visit.

### **Shore thing**

Reflect the direction and movement of waves on the shoreline through any form of sound production.

The player(s) should face looking out to sea.

In the case of ensemble versions players may be positioned in relative close proximity or be spread out over greater distances.

Mechanical means such as abseiling and prussiking may be used to achieve inaccessible locations.

### **Prayer**

Lying on the soft earth. Arms and legs outstretched. Eyes open. Looking to the sky.

Eyes closed. Begin to hum. Sustain and listen to your sound as it merges with all those others around you.

Repeat this process many times.

Then begin to imagine sounds which match what you see in the sky. Let these play as a silent counterpoint to your humming.

### **Untitled**

The sound of your walking on fallen leaves in the autumn.

### **Beautiful sounds**

Imagine sounds from the earth that you cannot hear, such as:

- grass growing
- the earth turning
- a butterfly settling on a flower

### **One for Mother**

Articulate environmental sounds through imitation and transformation of one or more of their structural parameters.

### **Another one for Mother**

Articulate natural landscape features as sound.

For example, a mountain range suggests changes in volume whilst the meandering course of a river describes the pitch movement of a melody line.

Repeat this process many times.

Then begin to imagine sounds which match what you see in the sky. Let these play as a silent counterpoint to your humming.

## **Sound as sculpture**

Resting on a bed of straw are eleven sonorous stones collected from a riverbed in North Wales which form the sound source for the sculpture *Ground work* by the English artist, Max Eastley. No human presence here as the acoustic life of the piece is determined by the 45 second cycle of an arm of spring steel, attached to which is a striker of mild steel which possesses a pitch of its own and moves over the surface of each stone, sounding its natural pitch (anon. 1978). This interaction of natural elements with those of man-made origin form the basis of much of Eastley's output. The resultant 'eco-music' advances the concept of a sound technology that owes nothing to the microchip but utilises the elemental forces of wind and water to produce sound. Eastley writes:

'The word I have temporarily chosen to designate my work is: **sonurgy** (from the Latin *son* - meaning sound, and from the Greek *ourgos* - meaning working). It is a synthesis of the simultaneous study of Kinetic Art, music and musical instruments. These are my sources. What proceeds is neither one nor the other. My aim is perfect synthesis and emancipation of these elements into a new form. This aim led me to adopt three categories of device. **Arlophones**: devices that use wind. **Hydrophones**: devices that use water. **Hydraeolophones** devices that use both wind and water.' (Eastley 1974)

Location recordings made in North Wales and Wiltshire of the 'Hydrophone' and the 'Elastic Aerophone/Centriphone' are featured on a 1978 recording [5] while more recent examples of Eastley's work were featured in a 1990 Channel Four documentary. Both visually and aurally these sound sculptures harmonise with the environment, discretely sounded by the surrounding elemental forces and never

imposing their presence: on a desolate beach, hollow tubes decorated with red, orange and black fabric strips blowing in the wind produce low-pitched, wavering flute-like sounds, merging with and emerging from the surrounding ambience of sea and sand, wind and surf. Their existence seems timeless and independent of human interference. We might look and listen but their sounds continue long after our departure.

A work created by Jim Hancock on Kinder Scout in the Derbyshire Peak District consists of a 50 metre length of washing line hung with plastic strips and activated by the wind. No recording or photographic evidence of the piece exists for the artist was seeking to create an audio definition of the environment on one particular day and at the same time visually defining the elemental force of the wind as it curved and shaped the elastic sculptural form. This is an art of the unique moment, rooted in the landscape and 'weathered' by the same force that has played a part in the shaping of other features on this wild plateau.

## The hills are alive

Work of this nature possesses a quality lacking in much contemporary art and music. This is an art of the 'primal', connecting with the expressive cultural forms of indigenous peoples who, through their 'singing of the land', are able to ritually attune with the Earth Spirit. In Mongolia it is in the song of the Umi people that we hear the Altai mountains. Their song is much more than a reflection of the mountain, it is the mountain, whose sound and spirit resides within the constant drone and its overlaid elaborate melodies. It is the belief of the Umi that when the song dies the sound of the mountain remains [6]. Citing this example brings to mind the work of the contemporary

German composer, Karlheinz Stockhausen, in whose orchestral work, *Gruppen* (Groups) for three orchestras (1955-57), can be found musical structures recreating mountainous forms:

'In *Gruppen* whole envelopes of rhythmic blocks are exact lines of mountains that I saw in Paspels in Switzerland right in front of my little window. Many of the time spectra, which are represented by superimpositions of different rhythmic layers - of different speeds in each layer - their envelope which describes the increase and decrease of the number of layers, their shape, so to speak, the shape of the time field, are the curves of the mountain's contour which I saw when I looked out the window.' (Stockhausen, quoted in Cott 1974)

At the heart of such a complex musical language as this lies the same relationship to landscape that expressed itself in the mountain song of the Umi. For late twentieth century man the adoption of such a world view has a healing potential for the mind, body and spirit. Bob Trubshaw has described this as akin to an altered state of consciousness:

'If we endeavour to explore such non-material realities of our landscape perhaps we can begin to resonate with our landscape, begin to experience its sacred places as harmonious vibrations, indeed to make these sites "sing". The hills are alive; their music requires the resonances of our bodies and minds.' (Trubshaw 1991).

In the performance practice of the contemporary artists and musicians cited, the earth becomes 'source', the intention being to work with her instinctively and make a sympathetic contact with the natural world. Of equal importance is the realisation that by using these examples as models for personal creative practice, the structures and methodology are provided for an individualised singing of the world, a means to respond through sound to the energies at

particular sites, to walk our own lines of song in and on the body of the Great Mother:

The path we walk bears no mark of any 'public right' and in some other land just might be sung.

The tree hung with rags

The rock step worn by man and water whose flow maps

on silt and stone the passage to the source.

(Untitled poem by Bob Dickinson from an unpublished collection, *Natural Logging*.)

## Notes

- 1: Recording of *Red Earth* by Michael Finnissy available as NMC D045
- 2: Sleeve notes to *Musique Sacrée Tibétaine*, Ocarina 71.
- 3: *Source No.2* (Davis, California).
- 4: Suzanne Vega, lyrics to collaboration with Phillip Glass on recording *Liquid Days*.
- 5: *New and Rediscovered Musical Instruments Obs 4*, 1975.
- 6: Radio 4 programme, 'Breath'; broadcast 27th December 1996.

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## MEYN MAMVRO

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# Major prehistoric ceremonial centre at Stanton Drew

A prehistoric ceremonial site twice as large as Stonehenge has been discovered during a geophysical survey commissioned by English Heritage. Traces of pits for a massive circular timber structure were revealed close to the three known stone circles at Stanton Drew near Bristol. There are similarities to Woodhenge and Durrington Walls (both near Stonehenge) but at Stanton Drew the pit circles are more numerous and probably held larger posts.

Dr Geoffrey Wainwright, English Heritage's chief architect, said the discovery was the most significant in British prehistory archaeology in 30 years. He explained: 'We have about 3,000 stone circles in Britain but previously only seven timber temples.'

There are no plans to excavate at Stanton Drew which remains one of the few major megalithic sites in England which has not been at the receiving end of the attentions of professional archaeologists or even antiquarian 'firtlings'.

## Sources

- Vince Russett, e-mail to ARCH-L list 15th November 1997.  
 BBC news web site (<http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/sci/tech/newsid%5F29000/29225.stm>): text circulated to BRITARCH e-mail list by Mike Heyworth 11th November 1997.

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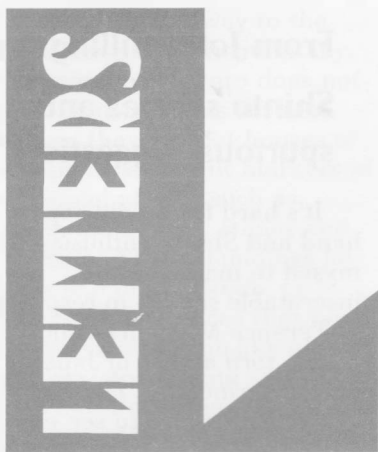
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From Jeremy Harte:

### Rock Art - Big Bangs and Astronomy

I was particularly interested in the rock art folklore provided by Graeme Chappell in *At the Edge* No.8, especially the use of the cups in stones at Dinas Dinorwic for gunpowder. This is presumably a variant of the widespread custom by which blacksmiths filled the punch hole at the end of an anvil with gunpowder and brought the sledgehammer down on it with the gratifying result of an almighty bang. They used to let off anvils in series for events like weddings and other village events. The custom must date from the time that gunpowder first became widely available, whenever that was - Guy Fawkes does not seem to have found any difficulty with supplies.

Interesting also to note that standing stones in the Highlands were associated with the moon and stars as early as the time of the Old Statistical Account. There are other examples from Gaelic areas which, from their remoteness and early date, one would imagine to represent an oral tradition independent of antiquarian thought. Which raises the question: granted that these things are astronomical markers, how on earth did the seventeenth century Scottish peasantry know? Are we really looking at a survival of tradition, or at something rediscovered in the middle ages by some inquiring rural inhabitant, a

mute, inglorious working class non-English-speaking illiterate Alexander Thom?

Also, how come there are traditions which speak of these monuments at an early date as temples, when they did not look like any religious building that the people around them had ever seen? How come you get places called Sunken Kirk and the Devil's Church in this country and abroad?

From Paul Devereux:

### Rayadors and leys

The interesting snippet of folklore about ploughing a straight rig in Nigel Pennick's article, 'Leys as Ideology' (*At the Edge* No.7, September, 1997), put me in mind of the 'rayadors' (the spelling if my memory serves me correctly) of Peru. Maria Reiche, who for half a century has studied the Nazca lines, noted that the farmers in the valleys beneath the Nazca pampa call in specialists to lay out the lines of their crops. These rayadors have an unerring ability to lay out dead straight lines. Reiche's experiments indicated that they had what she called 'telescopic' vision, measurably better than the average population. The rayadors come from specific family lines, and Reiche speculated that perhaps they descended from the people who laid out the remarkable straight lines up on the pampa and elsewhere in the Peruvian Andes.

In Pennick's article, one could similarly speculate that perhaps the use of willow sticks ('dods') and a distant sighting point referred to as a 'farthest beacon' was a left-over of earlier surveying methods, preserved in the ploughing skills and terminology of conservative countrylore. At least, one could argue that with just as much conviction that Pennick uses in his speculation that the ploughing tradition is the genesis of Watkins' ley concept. Furthermore, we know that the

genesis of Watkins' terms - he was quite open about it - related to the 'rods' formed by the horns of the snail, known in Watkins country as 'hoddymen dod'. That the country allusion with regard to the snail's horns had a similar meaning to the ploughman's willow rods is almost certain, and I for one do not see that Watkins drawing on the concepts and terminology that surrounded him affected the status of his claimed discovery. Indeed, they can be seen to have supported his contention that the old ley surveying traditions retained echoes in country language and practices down to his day.

I put this forward merely as an argument to balance Pennick's speculations for, in fact, I also think Watkins' basic ley ideas were incorrect, and I have been in print for some years now stating that. It is clear that some of Watkins' leys were spurious alignments, that others were not even alignments, as Pennick correctly points out. But it is also true that Watkins seems to have picked out the courses of genuine old straight tracks. His 'Sutton Walls Ley', for example, can be seen to be an alignment of cemeteries rather than church buildings, and the dark stain of a straight track was revealed during ploughing to cross a field directly on this alignment. I have argued that this is the trace of a church way or corpse road (*Geisterwege* or *spokenweg* in other countries, linking cemeteries), and that many of Watkins' church leys may record the courses of other such medieval features. This comes out of the sea-change in 'ley scholarship' over the best part of a decade now.

Indeed, it is hard to know what to make of Pennick's piece. It is not clear what he is referring to when he writes of 'leys', and whose use of the term he is attacking. That he can write on the subject while utterly ignoring the strides in understanding that were initiated by the final chapter (which I wrote) in our joint

1989 book, *Lines on the Landscape* (Hale), is at once staggering, insulting and depressing. The kindest gloss one can put on it is that Nigel Pennick is suffering from selective amnesia. For years, those of us researching the ley concept have been arguing against the pop 'new age' nonsense about energy lines, which does indeed carry a baggage of ideology and which, moreover, stifles sensible cross-disciplinary debate on the matter of linear landscape features of antiquity - one of the most ignored aspects of archaeology. We have also laid bare the spurious sixties' origins of the new ley hunting movement. Indeed, in my book with Peter Brookesmith on the the human phenomenon of 'ufology' (*UFOs and UFOlogy*, Blandford Press, November, 1997; Facts on File (USA), January, 1998) I have tracked the sixties' UFO-energy line association with leys to its true origins a decade earlier. Those of us tarred with the term 'ley hunter' today are genuine researchers trying to find the authentic meanings behind a range of ancient landscape markings in both the Old and New Worlds. This effort was signalled by issues 116 and 117 of *The Ley Hunter*, and in my *Shamanism and the Mystery Lines* (Quantum, 1992). The underlying concept of spirit lines and shamanistic landscapes has been further explored in my *The Long Trip* (Penguin Arkana, August, 1997 USA; January, 1998, UK) [see review elsewhere in this issue - RNT]. The approach has been ethnologically confirmed in the New World, while in the more complex Old World, let's say we are still working on it. The frustration with this work is that the public still generally thinks the new age notion of 'energy ley-lines' to be what the subject area is about, as do, I fear, quite a number of mainstream archaeologists who are out of date with our pioneering literature. (There

are exceptions to this, though, I'm pleased to say).

There is a sense from his piece that Pennick is not up-to-date with the latest thinking and literature. I recommend that he read my two-part article on the politics of geomantic information in *The Ley Hunter*, Nos.126 and 128. It is all about the problems of securing honest scholarship in this field.

## Response from Nigel Pennick:

Paul Devereux's claims in his comments on my ley ideology piece are yet another instance of that ideology, where instead of addressing the points I make concerning factionalism and competitiveness, he accuses me of being 'staggering, insulting and depressing' whilst pretending that I had no part in the sections of *Lines on the Landscape* that he considers important. It makes me sad to see him forget how much of my work he drew upon in the parts of our joint book to which he now claims exclusive authorship.

In this letter, instead of discussing matters humanely, all the unrelieved *ad hominem* nastiness is vented against me once again, a device that he uses as a link for a promotion of his latest books as definitions of 'pioneering thinking'.

Leyline 'research' has been fraught with fashionable ideas and ideologies and Mr Devereux is taking quite a risk when he stakes his whole credibility on his claim that what he is doing is representing 'honest scholarship'. In using this phrase he shows little recognition of the ideological nature of definitions of scholarship. Over the last thirty years few ideas in leyline studies have stood the test of time. Will the latest orthodoxy soon go the way of all the other 'certain bets' that fell at the first fence?

## From John Billingsley: Shinto shrines and spurious suggestions

It's hard for an old Japan hand and Shinto enthusiast like myself to maintain an inscrutable silence in response to Terence Meaden's comments on the *torii* arches of Japan's Shinto shrines (*At The Edge* 7).

While it's nice to see esoteric Japan getting a mention in the west for something other than Zen, once again it gets affected by western imposition of values. We really don't know much about it, do we? As evidenced by *The Independent's* front page picture of Mount Fuji with the caption describing it as 'overlooking Kyoto' (December 9, 1997) - laughable if it wasn't a national newspaper, as although Fuji is pretty lofty, at 250 miles distance from Kyoto it beats even the strongest telescope! Still, it's in Japan, and as the success of the *Sun*, *Mirror*, etc, shows, readers might believe anything you tell them.

I hope that's not true of *At The Edge*, because no matter how many mantra-like times one repeats 'torii vulva', it doesn't make it so, and I can't imagine any reputable Japanese archaeologist or Shintoist going along with the idea.

The *torii* is indeed a sacred gate, marking the threshold from one level of space (usually mundane) to another. Additionally, as a two-dimensional symbol it confers a sanctity on the place thus decorated - that's why you see *torii* painted on concrete walls that late-night drunks habitually piss against. We could read a Goddess inference into that if we really wanted to, but let's allow the Japanese a say in their own sacred symbols. My Japanese wife raised a *torii*-like eyebrow when I read her their description as a 'yonic gap'!

And nowhere in my experience do the Japanese say that this gate is a 'vulvar arch' on 'the way to the Great

Mother'! It is the way to the Shinto shrine and incidentally, by convention, Shinto does not have temples, it has shrines, because they are not houses of worship as such, but markers of worshipful places, such as certain mountains, stones and waterfalls. Shrine buildings lay at the end of the *sando*, or approach way; places that may be typified as womb-like are rare, save for certain sacred caves like Udo Jingu, on the coast near Miyazaki in Kyushu, and a new shrine building, with an interior reddened by stained glass, at Ishikiri, near Osaka, which was built in 1987 according to instructions from a 'mother goddess' who revealed herself in dream to the shrine priest in the 1980s. The overt phallic imagery of shrines like Asuka-ni-imasu and Tagata further discourage description of the *torii* as leading to the Goddess' womb.

It is true that the principal deity of Shinto, and the divine ancestress of the Japanese people, is a goddess, but the attributes of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu do not tally with the generally accepted western image of a 'mother goddess' - She is not associated with birthing in any of the myths, and indeed has no more fertility associations than, say, the Morrigan of the Celts. It is also true that She retreats into a cave at one point, but this is a divine sulk, and again has no fertility or womb-like interpretation - many sacred caves are therefore sacred by this episode, rather than a womb-like association.

The third paragraph, claiming that the 'validity of the meaning of the three-sided *torii* vulva is indisputable because Shinto . . . is a living religion . . . ' is actually meaningless in its entirety, as it gives no evidence other than bland assertion to back up the claim. Paraphrased, it reads 'it is so because I say it is so'. While people still worship at shrines, they are not worshipping some image of the Great Mother, because the concept is simply

not there and in any case, most shrines are essentially dedicated to *local kami* (deity or numinous essence), i.e. their meaning is local and individual, not part of some national cultural scheme. *Torii* may announce sacred space, but they do not describe it, as Dr Meaden would have us believe.

The writer goes on to talk about Stonehenge and West Kennet Long Barrow as if they have a bearing on the subject of Japanese *torii*; they do not, and the trilithons of megaliths and *torii* cannot be mutually advanced either stylistically or culturally as evidence for vulvic Goddess worship. There are indications of Goddess-worship in Japan familiar to western concepts - try the female member of the seven lucky gods (imported from China and points west?), Benzaiten, or Benten, whose attributes are highly reminiscent of Brigit. Or maybe I should submit for publication my interpretation of certain Japanese chambered tombs as containing the imagery of a rebirthing Earth goddess (these places are not Shinto).

Let me correct another couple of assertions while I am at it; Japan does not have 'many stone circles' - it has a few, small and wheel-like in design, and they are very, very different from what we are used to in the west. Its chambered tombs are very late - third to seventh century CE, mostly - and not coeval with the wheel-circles. Megalithic sites in Japan are also - and this is an important point - not generally sacred to Shinto; they come from an earlier culture which the Shinto of the last two millennia does not recognise. The *shoro-nagashi* (soul-flowing) custom does not, in our experience, involve a *torii* (it is actually Buddhistic in tone), although the paper boats are often floated under the arch of a bridge.

It seems that I have found fault with just about everything Dr Meaden has claimed for Japan in his article; I am sorry for that, but it is certainly true,

as he says, that 'it is our misfortune and our loss that little is known about [Japan's fertility imagery] in the West'. Because we might believe anything anybody tells us! Let's not be led up the *sando* path by an imposition of western Goddess cultural imperialism.

## From Nigel Pennick:

### Padstow folklore

Regarding the Padstow Obby Oss reference in the review of Cheryl Traffon's *The Earth Goddess (At the Edge No.8)*, it appears that Ms Traffon has taken the dates 1346-7 as a 'reference'. These dates come from a statement made by a Mr Francis Docton, some time in the nineteenth century, that the Obby Oss first appeared at the siege of Calais in 1346-7 and scared off the French. This is referred to in Donald R. Rawe's *Padstow's Obby Oss* (1982 edition page 13) and it appears to have been 'collected' by Thurston Peter, who wrote a piece on the 'Hobby Horse' in the *Journal of the Royal Institute of Cornwall* (Vol.18, 1913).

Thus the dates are not documentary evidence but folklore and as such are not evidence for the antiquity of the Padstow tradition. Rev Polwele's *History of Cornwall* of 1803 mentions a man in a stallion's skin, which may have been quite different from the present elaborate structure.

## From Cheryl Traffon:

### Padstow and Goddesses

You are of course entitled to your opinions about the books you review, though judging by the 'double whammy' in *At the Edge No.8* reviews on both my book *The Earth Goddess* and Terence Meaden's *Stonehenge: the Secret of the Solstice* you are clearly very uncomfortable about interpretations of

Goddess material. I do not think it would be very productive to get into a blow-by-blow refutation of your criticism of the particular examples from my book that you chose, save to say that it is all a matter of the weight any of us place on the interpretations and extrapolations from the evidence in any given case. Clearly I believe that my conclusions were cogently argued and reasonably deduced from the material available, and you do not. You believe that I should have examined 'alternative explanations'. I find this a very curious statement. My explanations and conclusions are based on my research, and had I believed different explanations I would not have written this book! I do not recall you expecting other writers to explore 'alternative explanations' in their books, which leads me to believe that that your review says more about where you are coming from than it does my book!

As I said I do not want to take up the pages of your publication with detailed refutation, but I cannot let pass your comments on the Obby Oss, since you devote 42 lines of your review to dismissing my interpretation of it, despite the fact that the reference to it in my book does not form in any way a key part of the book, and it is almost an aside in a book crammed full of specific Goddess material. I find this very odd! However, as it is very much on my 'home patch' and you challenge me to back up my reference, I will do so. Your inference is that I have plucked the date of 1346-7 for the Obby Oss out of thin air. Not so! The folklorist Thurston Peter recounted in a lecture given in 1913 that he had been told by a Padstow inhabitant, a Mr E.O. Williams, that he in turn had been told at an earlier time by a workman that a Francis Docton, a tailor of Padstow, had recounted that the Obby Oss (not Hobby Horse incidentally as you say in your review) first appeared in Padstow during the

siege of Calais, which was 1346-7. Now I would readily agree that this is not first-hand evidence, but one could certainly argue for continuity of folk memory and oral tradition through generations of Padstow inhabitants. If the women from the Western Isles of Scotland were singing twelfth century Gaelic songs they had learned from their mothers and grandmothers in the late nineteenth century when they were recorded, I do not think it inconceivable that the inhabitants of a remote and isolated Cornish village retained a memory of the early origin of their Obby Oss.

The post-Huttonite trend seems to be to dismiss any possibility of continuity of tradition for everything earlier than its first written reference. As such, I am aware that *The Earth Goddess* provides a radical challenge to that blandly-assumed notion. I have already received quite a number of letters thanking me for reclaiming 'our' heritage and history from those readers who feel that many existing interpretations of prehistory and history unvoice and deny them. Maybe its not the evidence that bothers our Bob so much, as the disturbing possibility that Goddess worship may actually have been both widespread and incredibly long-lasting in Britain and Ireland!

### Response from Bob Trubshaw:

I normally allow those aggrieved by my articles or reviews to have the last word but Cheryl's personal assumption in the last sentence (viz. that I would consider it to be a 'disturbing possibility that Goddess worship may actually have been both widespread and incredibly long-lasting in Britain and Ireland') is wildly inaccurate. There is nothing disturbing to me about this possibility - indeed, only a few years ago I too was searching hard to find evidence that this

might be true. The only thing I find disturbing about such claims is that - despite my own tentative researches and Cheryl's much more substantial efforts - the evidence simply does not hold up to support the belief. The criticisms in my review of *The Earth Goddess* relate to a few specific areas where I know enough about the subject to show that Cheryl's 'joining up the dots' has created a pattern that simply is not there to my eyes.

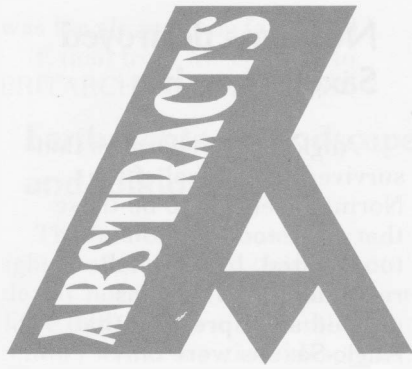
### From Richard Lee: National Index of Holy Wells

Please let me inform you of a project that might be of interest to your readers, the National Index of Holy Wells. This is a non-profit making cataloguing programme that is attempting to build up a comprehensive body of information on all of England's surviving Holy Wells.

It is hoped that eventually it will be used to aid in their preservation and help to ensure the survival of their associated traditions and customs. To do this we need help. The project is looking for people to contribute information to the index, by completing index issued forms that cover wells' history, traditions, structure, folklore, social roles and so on.

For more information contact:  
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Letters to the editor  
are always welcome -  
please keep them short and  
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Mid-March to ensure they  
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## From confusion to chaos

Can changes in prehistoric society be explained by cause-and-effect? Or should societies be regarded as 'complex dynamic systems' - and therefore unpredictable (although deterministic)? Yes, folks, it's time for Chaos Theory to be applied to archaeology. Contrary to popular misconception, Chaos Theory does not imply randomness and disorder, but rather is an attempt to show that order lies behind what may seem random. Henrik Gerding and Dominic Ingemark provide a lucid overview in 'Beyond Newtonian thinking - towards a non-linear archaeology: Applying Chaos Theory to archaeology' (*Current Swedish Archaeology* Vol.5 (1997) p49-64) and show that Chaos Theory has major consequences for our view of determinism and predictability in social and cultural change.

## Cataclysm and cultural collapse

It is time to take cataclysmic collapses of prehistoric civilisations seriously, folks. No, not academic respectability for certain fringe writers whose deductive processes are several factors short of an equation - although the suggestion does involve 'visitors' from space. The 'visitors' being proposed are comets. Latest estimates suggest that air-exploding comets (such as the famous event at Tunguska in Siberia in 1908, which had the explosive effect of about 2,000 Hiroshima-sized nuclear

bombs but left no impact crater) occur every 100 years or so. Even larger comets are known to have impacted the Earth and would lead to ecological crises on a global scale. In 'Comets and disaster in the Bronze Age' (*British Archaeology* No.30 p6-7) Benny Peiser suggests that the collapse of at least seven major civilisations about 2300 BC and a 'rerun' of similar scale about 1200 BC could both have been triggered by major air-exploding comets.

## New World ceremonial centres

Two articles dealing with different aspects of New World archaeology reveal the complexity of attempting to understand the original cultures - and thereby reveal the need for a much more complex approach to the study of the archaeological evidence than is the case so far for either New or Old World prehistory.

S. Plog and J. Solomonto, 'The never-changing and the ever-changing: the evolution of western Pueblo ritual', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* Vol.7, No.2, pp161-182 and W.R. DeBoer, 'Ceremonial centres from the Cayapas (Esmeraldas, Ecuador) to Chillicothe (Ohio, USA)', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* Vol.7, No.2, pp225-253.

## Enigmatic earthen mounds

Around the beginning of this millennia, the southern half of what is now Wisconsin was dotted with thousands of earth mounds in the shape of birds, deer, amphibians and other animals. Earlier settlers and modern development have destroyed almost all of these mounds but those that are left suggest that their construction was complex and that mound groups show clear astronomical alignments. T.C. Solberg and J.P. Sherz ('Drawn in the USA', *The Ley Hunter* No.129, Nov 1997, p6-10) provide a useful introduction, avoiding much of

the excessive speculation usually associated with this subject.

## Florida's mounds

A surprising variety of different tribes lived in Florida at the time of European contact and they left outstanding wooden sculptures, hundreds of pyramid mounds, dozens of artificial islands, linear canals, standing stones and other earthworks - including an effigy island. As with Wisconsin, most have been destroyed but Christine Rhone ('Old Florida and some of its native Amerindian sites', *Northern Earth* No.72 p13-17) provides a good overview.

## Nazca's lines

Peru's well-known drawings are now thought to have been intended to bring rain to the Nazca plateau. *Sunday Times* 17th Aug 1997; *Fortean Times* No.106 p20.

## Cosmology in SE Asia

There is a whole series of different cosmological systems and myths in south Asia from Vedic, through later Hindu myths and the distinct Buddhist and Jain beliefs. Different again are the later Sikh and Islamic cosmologies. These various ideas manifest in the architecture of the continent and are discussed in two articles in *Cosmos* Vol.12 No.2 (Dec 1996) - J.A.B. Hegewald's 'Depictions of the cosmos in south Asian water architecture' (pp115-130) and P. Indorf 'Cosmologies and customised paradigms in the architecture of southeast Asia' (pp163-192).

## All about the Bend

Everything you yearned to know about the archaeology of the 'Bend of the Boyne' is included in a full colour supplement to *Archaeology Ireland* Vol.11 No.3. Up-to-date information on Newgrange, Dowth and their recently-restored neighbour, Knowth.



But the Boyne Valley has plenty of archaeology other than massive passage graves. Neolithic 'ceremonial enclosures', a 'ritual pond', the Newgrange cursus, and prehistoric settlements are all discussed, together with prestigious medieval religious centres and post-medieval salmon fishing. All-in-all an impressive summary of a very special landscape.

### All about Uisneach

Uisneach is one of Ireland's major prehistoric ceremonial landscapes - a 'central place' more or less in the geographical centre of the island - but little archaeological work has been done there since the 1920s. Recent field work is summarised in C. Donaghy and E. Grogan's 'Navel-gazing at Uisneach, Co. Westmeath', *Archaeology Ireland* Vol.11 No.4 [No.42] p24-6.

### Black Mountain neolithic landscapes

A site-by-site survey of the chambered tombs of the Black Mountains of the Welsh Marches supports an exploration of their relationship with the landscape, suggesting they form a 'sociocultural and symbolic map'

George Nash, 'At the centre of the Neolithic world', *3rd Stone* No.28 p12-18.

### Stonehenge - the true experience

The builders of Stonehenge intended the monument to be approached along an avenue heading south-west so that the Heel Stone (originally one of a pair) acted as a 'portal' to the monument. Today the A344 and fences prevent access along this avenue. John Barrett ('Stonehenge, land, sky and the seasons', *British Archaeology* No.29, November 1997, p8-9) argues persuasively that such 'messiness . . . makes our management of this monument such a disgrace.'

### Kilmartin's timber circle

Rescue excavations in advance of a gravel quarry near the celebrated 'linear cemetery' of Bronze Age cairns at Kilmartin have revealed many more sites than expected. These include what may have been 'one of the principal ritual centres in the valley', a timber circle some 46 metres across constructed in the Neolithic but remaining in use in the Bronze Age.

Simon Denison, 'Timber circle in Argyll's ritual valley', *British Archaeology* No.29, November 1997, p5.

### Stanton Drew's timber temple

Recent geophysical surveys have revealed the post holes for a massive timber-built temple some 95 metres across (the proposed Millennium Dome at Greenwich is only three times larger) in close proximity to the remains of the stone circles at Stanton Drew, seven miles south of Bristol. David Keys, 'Giant temple sheds new light on the Stone Age', *The Independent* 11th Nov 1997 [cutting kindly submitted by Rose Haeword]; for details visit <http://www.eng-h.gov.uk/archaeometry/StantonDrew/>

### Did they or didn't they?

'How much did Britain, and the British landscape, really change under the Romans?' Debbie Day answers her own question in 'Change and evolution in Roman Britain' (*British Archaeology* No.30 p8-9) with evidence for change (abandonment of hill forts and inception of towns, new religious practices, etc) and for continuity (rural settlement - including industrial sites - and sacred places) plus some 'continuing changes' e.g. coinage and new trade patterns that started before the Roman invasion.

### Normans destroyed Saxon churches

'Anglo-Saxon churches that survived the arrival of the Normans tended to be those that were too small, or were too isolated, to be worth rebuilding, and this has created an impression that Anglo-Saxons were only capable of building cramped, unsophisticated churches.' New research by Sally Crawford and Chris Guy ('As Normans tore down Saxon cathedrals', *British Archaeology* No.29, November 1997, p7) provides tentative physical evidence for the tenth century cathedral at Worcester - big enough to have 18 altars - which William the Conqueror ordered to be replaced.

### Sex and gender

Those who enjoyed Lynn Meskell's article 'Constructing sex and gender in archaeology' in *At the Edge* No.6 may be interested in a more detailed discussion of the 'construction' of gender, with the ideas applied to prehistoric figures from Cyprus.

A.B. Knapp and L. Meskell, 'Bodies of evidence on prehistoric Cyprus', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* Vol.7, No.2, pp183-204.

### Beer not bread

Residues discovered in Neolithic and Bronze Age pots suggest that the principal ingredients were barely, meadowsweet plus the known psychoactive plants henbane and deadly nightshade. Practical experiments by Merryn Dineley of Manchester University show that meadowsweet flowers (N.B. *not* the whole plant which results in an unpleasant-tasting brew) and malted barley cakes produces a beer 'tasted very similar to modern beer'. Dineley concludes that 'there is a good case for arguing that barely cultivation in Britain

was for ale and nor for bread.'

E-mail from M. Dineley to  
BRITARCH list 18 Dec 1997.

## Earth lights in landscape and folklore

The folklore of anomalous lights - often termed 'fairies' but clearly not the same as the quaint 'little folk' of late nineteenth century literature - is widespread. Phil Quinn brings together many little-known examples in 'The Devil's Eye', *3rd Stone* No.28 p20-22.

## Earth lights update

The inventor of the 'earthlights hypothesis', Paul Devereux, brings his ideas up to date in the comprehensively-entitled 'Everything you've always wanted to know about earth lights', *Fortean Times* No.103 (Oct 1997) p26-31.

## Buzzing around

Keeping in tune with two articles in this issue of *At the Edge*, anomalous buzzing sounds in remote places - termed the 'humadruz' - are reported by seven readers of *Northern Earth*. 'The Buzz', *Northern Earth* No.72 p20-21.

## Wells and divination

The place-name Fritwell or Fretwell (examples in Oxfordshire, Yorkshire, Shropshire and Nottinghamshire) seems to have originally meant 'a spring used for divination'. C. Hough 'The place-name Fritwell', *Journal of The English Place-Name Society* No.29 (1996-7) p65-69.

## Leys go off into the sunset

Some good ol' fashioned 'ley hunting' combined with some old style archaeoastronomy suggests that in Belgium and northern France there are lines of churches associated with key solar events. E. Zimmer, 'Archaeoastronomy and ley lines', *The Ley Hunter* No.129, Nov 1997, p14-19.



Richard Hayman

## RIDDLES IN STONE

### Myths, archaeology and the ancient Britons

Hambledon Press 1997  
253 x 180 mm, 332 pages,  
illustrated, hardback, £25.00

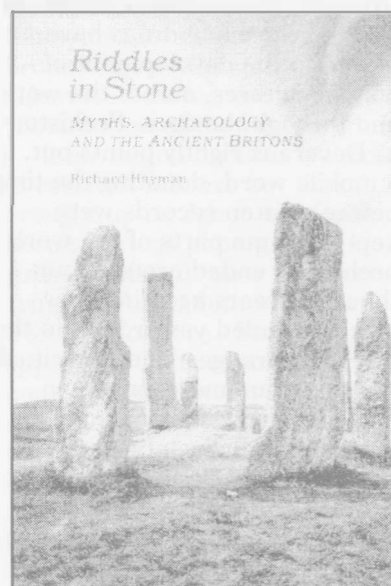
'With hindsight, it is clear that in writing about [prehistoric] monuments each generation has said as much about itself as it has about prehistory.' So concludes the author of *Riddles in Stone*. In the preceding 300 pages he has demonstrated this clearly, with astute 'cameos' of the people who have been interpreting prehistoric monuments in Britain over the past 500 years - such as William Stukeley, Gordon Childe and John Michell.

The author is a professional archaeologist now working at the Ironbridge Gorge Museum. However his original inspiration, back in the late 70s, was through ley hunting. 'This dual interest in orthodox and fringe viewpoints subsequently taught me that no special interest group can claim ownership of the past . . .' Indeed, he also asserts that 'A thriving alternative scene continues to produce challenging interpretations of the monuments, and archaeologists should take them more seriously than they do.' Elsewhere he comments on the uncanny resemblance between Professor Richard Bradley's description of the Temple Wood

stone circle at Kilmartin and some of Paul Devereux's writings. Indeed, in the concluding paragraphs Hayman states that much of what earth mysteries researchers has contributed to the understanding of ancient monuments 'has been appropriated now by the mainstream.'

As a history of archaeology it is a curious work, as the scope is restricted to prehistoric monuments. However, Hayman comes up with many interesting opinions along the way. Noting that access to the 'archaeology of death' is generally restricted to professionals, this academic obsession with digging up bones contrasts with earth mysteries writers who have emphasised fertility and life. However, earth mysteries 'remains a consolation, not a solution'.

*Riddles in Stone* is certainly a book with similar ambitions to *At the Edge*. The author has read his way through a wide literature of academic and 'fringe' books but, on the basis of the substantial bibliography, appears never to have read any of the 'fringe' periodicals (although he is clearly well aware that the melting pot for academic ideas is within the pages of the various journals). Furthermore, apart from an acknowledgement to Paul Devereux, there seems to have been little direct contact with



any of the earth mysteries researchers he writes about. So we have a book where all the 'bones' are in the right places but the essential 'flesh and blood' is lacking. However, this is a major weakness rather than a fatal flaw.

Unfortunately *Riddles in Stone* is designed to look like a dull academic style work and the author's photographs and other illustrations, while competent, do little to justify the cover price. This is unfortunate as, had this book appeared as an affordable paperback edition, it may well have achieved the wide readership it deserves in both academic and 'fringe' circles.

This is certainly one book which all *At the Edge* readers should get their hands on; hopefully your local library can help if £25 is out of reach.

Bob Trubshaw

Paul Devereux

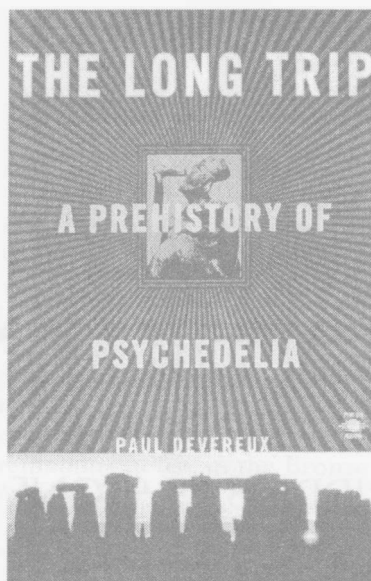
## THE LONG TRIP

### A prehistory of psychedelia

Arkana US edition 1997; UK edition 1998

202 x 135 mm, 298 pages, illustrated, paperback

For those of us who prefer their psychedelia without flared trousers, this is a book about the part psychoactive drugs have played in the development of human cultures, across the world and through the ages. Prehistory, as Devereux rightly points out, is a mobile word, denoting the time before written records were kept. In some parts of the world prehistory ended around four thousand years ago - in other places it ended yesterday. So the discussion ranges from the ritual use of opium and cannabis in ancient Europe and Asia, to the ingestion of hallucinogenic mushrooms and vines in the Americas in the twentieth century. Historical evidence and ancient texts are backed up by modern research into the



neuropsychology of drug experience: clinical studies are balanced with anecdotal accounts, and detailed descriptions of the subjective effects of various drugs illustrate their impact on art, religion and material culture.

The book ends with a thoughtful chapter on the present and future of humanity's love-affair with psychedelics. As archaeological and anthropological studies go, this is a real pearl of a book, a dazzlingly erudite work liberally sprinkled with a wealth of evidence and ideas, written with wit, honesty and a perceptiveness born of experience, framed as it with an account of the author's own drug experiments in the sixties and his musings on the social and spiritual repercussions of contemporary drug use. It is easy to read and accessible without watering down the subject in any way, and is a valuable text-book as well as being an entertaining read.

The book's one weak point is the chapter on straight spirit-paths in relation to shamanic ecstasy, especially where the author discusses possible European examples - it is not especially important or relevant to the rest of the book, and tends to sidetrack the reader somewhat. But then one cannot blame an author for continuing to press home his ideas, and it does not really

detract from what is unarguably an excellent and stimulating study, an important, timely and sensitive addition to more than one field.

Alby Stone

Laurence Coupe

## MYTH

Routledge 1997

200 x 127 mm, 219 pages, paperback £6.99

After reading books like this one could perhaps be forgiven for concluding that ancient myth was created by foresighted sages solely to provide material for twentieth century novelists and film makers. Laurence Coupe's book has precious little to offer the study of ancient myth, though it sheds some light on the influence that the theories of anthropologists and historians of religion have exercised upon the arts. Coupe discusses a number of works based on particular readings of mythological material - including Frazer's massive shaggy dog story *The Golden Bough*, Freud's Oedipus complex, Jung's archetypes - and boils the whole lot down into a dynamic opposition between order and chaos, the modern versus the postmodern, T.S. Eliot versus Jim Morrison. In truth this tells us next to nothing about ancient myth, but is a sometimes entertaining guide to how easily flawed hypotheses can enter the popular imagination if they tell us what we want to hear at the time.

*Myth* should perhaps have been subtitled to inform the unwary reader that it is about the influence of a few modern - and postmodern - paradigms on twentieth century literature. As a basic introduction to myth in the field of literary criticism *Myth* is a usefully provocative text, but as an introduction to the theory of myth and the making of myth (which the back cover blurb proclaims it to be, among other things) it is inadequate and outdated. Worth reading though for the

chapters on *The Doors and Apocalypse Now*.

Alby Stone

J.D.A. Widdowson

## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BRITISH FOLKLORE

Published jointly by CECTAL at Sheffield and the Department of Folklore at the Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Send Can\$35 to Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada A1C 5S7 (there is no UK distributor).

This is a big book, produced in a hurry, responding to demands for a working bibliography on folklore in Britain. Hold your breath for the revised and amended second edition. Meanwhile what you get for your money is an amalgamated catalogue of three libraries - that of the Folklore Society to start with, plus the Goldstein Collection (Mississippi) and the Halpert Library (Newfoundland). There are about ten thousand entries, alphabetically by author. Gems found at random included *Gnomologia*, *Bawdy Barrack-Room Ballads* and *Rathlin: Island of Blood and Enchantments*, plus the eerily prophetic *Dunblane Traditions: Being A Series of Warlike Narratives and Eccentric Characters*. Dedicated researchers will find more on every page. In fact you have to read every page, as there is no index, thus defeating the entire purpose of compiling a bibliography in the first place.

It's a long book, and it could have been shorter if it had stuck to folklore, but there are dozens of parish histories and guidebooks in here too, with the occasional foray into rural social history and the very specialised field of vernacular crafts and artefacts. Oddly enough, it does

not include all the recent books on British folklore, even those which were reviewed by *Folklore*. Authors who will be familiar to readers of this journal get short shrift - the prolific Janet Bord and Nigel Pennick squeeze through on the basis of one book each, while Nigel Jackson isn't here at all.

This has the makings of a useful book, but readers have to do the donkey-work of updating it. What went wrong? Probably the British folklore tradition itself. This book opens a window on a Victorian library of peasant customs and savage myths, a monument to intellectual curiosity that somehow dwindled to a few safe topics after World War II. What it needs is less pillow lace and thatching, and more X-files. And it needs an index.

Jeremy Harte

Mick Sharp

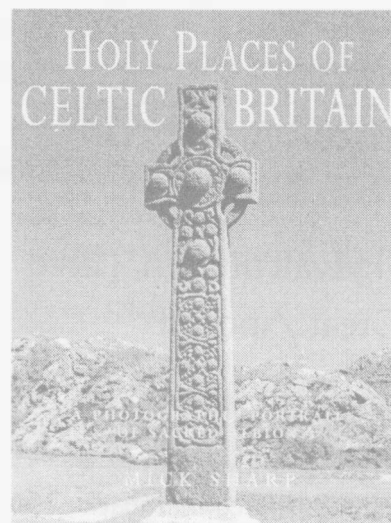
## HOLY PLACES OF CELTIC BRITAIN

### A photographic portrait of sacred Albion

Blandford 1997

287 x 228 mm, 192 pages, fully illustrated with colour and b&w photographs, hardback £20.00

Coffee table books can be all-too humdrum unless they contain stunningly gorgeous photographs. Fortunately Mick Sharp is a seriously stunning photographer. He also happens to know quite a bit about British archaeology. The result is a book which is good to leave lurking for 'dipping in to', and also provides sufficient site-by-site information to act as a guide book. Being a Blandford book, the title inevitably has the word 'Celtic' interjected (no doubt there will be follow up entitled *Holy Places of Arthurian Britain*) but try not to



allow this to put you off as it's hard to spot anything specifically 'Celtic' about the places illustrated and described.

Some may be familiar with Sharp's outstanding black and white photographs, such as his excellent collaboration with Peter Fowler published by Cambridge UP in 1990 as *Images of Prehistory*. In *Holy Places of Celtic Britain* Sharp is able to show his abilities with colour photographs. OK, his b&w images are stronger but I'd be hard pushed to name anyone who has taken quite so many dramatic colour photos of British ancient sites. Unlike many archaeological guide books, there are also images of sites where there are no surviving 'above ground' features - so, for instance, there is a photograph of the underside of an M25 bridge at Runnymede, where a late Bronze Age settlement was discovered during the construction of the bridge.

Information on sites extends to relevant folklore but those brought up on Janet and Colin Bord's various photographic guide books will miss the more 'fringe' information, as - apart from the folklore - Sharp appears to be unaware of non-academic interest in ancient sacred sites. However this narrowness of outlook is offset by the combination of dependable factual information and spectacular images.

Bob Trubshaw

Anthony Aveni

## STAIRWAYS TO THE STARS

### Skywatching in Three Great Ancient Cultures

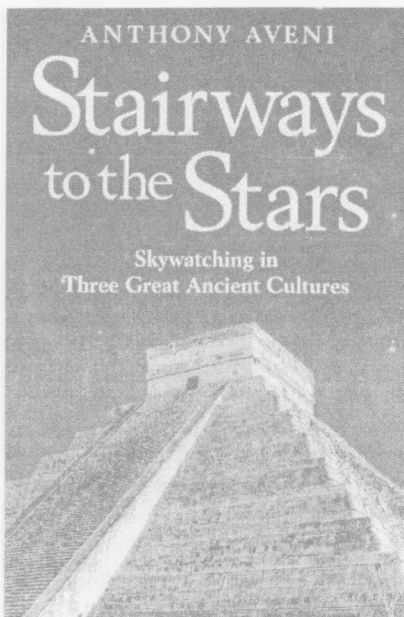
Cassell 1997

242 x 155 mm, 230 pages,  
fully illustrated, hardback  
£15.99

*Stairways to the Stars* explores the evidence for the way other cultures contemplated the natural world - and the sky in particular. To do this we need to overcome the way modern science has taught us to view space and time; it is easy to forget that only very recently has Western culture deviated from all other cultures in developing an ideology of infinite space-time to frame colossal cataclysmic events, with humanity relegated to the role of insignificant bystander.

Archaic systems of astronomy have been seriously investigated since the 1960s when ancient sites - notably Stonehenge - were shown to embody alignments to significant solar and lunar events. Since then the small number of active archaeoastronomists - among whom Anthony Aveni is a leading authority - have moved beyond merely looking for significant alignments and now attempt to understand the role of astronomy in ancient cultures. In the 60s and 70s most work was at megalithic sites in Europe; since then the emphasis has changed to the ancient cultures of Italy, Mexico and Peru.

In *Stairways to the Stars* Aveni provides a summary of the archaeoastronomy of Stonehenge (including the deficiencies of some of the early enthusiasts) together with a



detailed survey of both ancient Mayan astronomy (where Venus is the principal focus of interest) and Inca astronomy (where solar worship leads to whole landscapes constructed around *ceques* aligned to astronomical events). Many terms used by archaeoastronomers are difficult to grasp but Aveni succeeds in minimising the technical terminology and providing clear jargon-busting descriptions where necessary.

*Stairways to the Stars* is an excellent introduction to a field of study which provides surprisingly detailed insights into the way other cultures thought of the world around them.

Bob Trubshaw

Donald Tyler

## THE COMING OF THE SUN

### A prologue to Ika sacred narrative

Pitt Rivers Museum 1997

245 x 180 mm, 199 pages, 18  
b&w photos, paperback £20.95  
Available from Pitt Rivers  
Museum, South Parks Road,  
Oxford, OX1 3PP

Some readers may recall the remarkable TV programme of 1990, *From the Heart of the World* about the Kogi of Colombia. If the Kogi were previously little-known, then one of the other tribes who also live in the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta - the Ika - are even more obscure. *The Coming of the Sun* is a detailed introduction to Ika mythology, especially creation myths. There is much in common with Kogi culture - such as the central role of the 'mamas' or priests - but Ika and Kogi cultures are distinct. The book is based on field work by the author in the late 60s, when he spent two years living with the Ika and gaining their trust.

Those interested in the 'otherness' of traditional South America belief systems will find few books as informative as *The Coming of the Sun*.

Bob Trubshaw

George Applegate

## THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO DOWSING

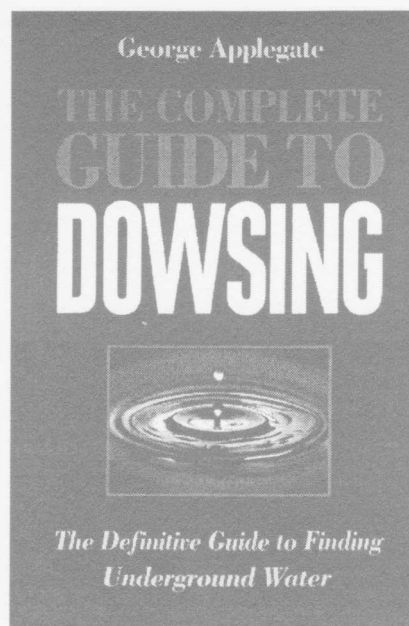
### The definitive guide to finding underground water

Element 1997

240 x 160 mm, 302 pages,  
illustrated, hardback £18.99

Apart from the fleeting reference to psychic or 'spiritual' energy when trying to explain the rather more illusive aspects of the dowsing phenomenon, Applegate tries to distance himself from what he describes as 'fringe' interests in favour of a nuts, bolts, drills and flow-rates view of the subject.

Here at last is something which deals with the very practical problem of seeking underground water sources at a time when water (or rather the



lack of it) is becoming a topic of daily conversation. If you are looking for something deep and meaningful which recycles thread-bear notions of ley-energy and earth chakras; this is not for you. However, if you want an authoritative, accessible and clearly written book by one who uses the system in a functional way, take this as a recommendation.

Applegate's credentials seem sound as being a pupil of W.J.A. Mullins, a famous west country water diviner who is also known to have taught Guy Underwood his basic technique.

The book however is really only one-third Applegate's own work, the rest comprises articles written by fellow dowsers including Guy Underwood, who tackle the finer points of the subject.

The information found in Appendix II is worth shelf space alone for anyone interested or involved in the process. This section contains diagrams of the geological systems every diviner should be aware of in the search for water. Here also is a detailed glossary of terms relating to the capacity, weight and flow of water together with information concerning purity testing and average water requirements of buildings etc. Lastly, the author outlines the

unexpected legal requirements for water abstraction and emphasises the rules and regulations governing this activity.

Norman Fahy

Joseph Epes Brown

## ANIMALS OF THE SOUL

Sacred animals of the Oglala Sioux

Element. Second edition 1997  
228 x 153 mm, 142 pages, illustrated, paperback, £7.99

Joseph Epes Brown is perhaps best known for his previous book, *The Sacred Pipe* (1953) which was the result of a request from the Lakota holy man Black Elk to create a written record of the Sioux nation's spiritual legacy. The first edition of *Animals of the soul* appeared in 1992 and contains more detail on those aspects of the Sioux beliefs dealing with animals.

Apart from the wealth of 'real' information about these beliefs, the book is a real eye-opener to all those who previously have only encountered shamanistic beliefs through superficial texts - be they New Age or academic works by non-specialists.

To those interested in interpreting shamanistic art, this book shows just how much information is 'encoded' in ways which require prior knowledge to recognise. For example, a dancer depicted holding what appears to be a drum marked with a cross and a small circle is, according to the caption, a hoop with a circular mirror representing the Elk's heart supported by spider webs. Without this 'inside knowledge' such images would, I suspect, be interpreted in a much more simplistic and inaccurate manner.

Bob Trubshaw

Mark Sunlin

## WATER DRAGONS

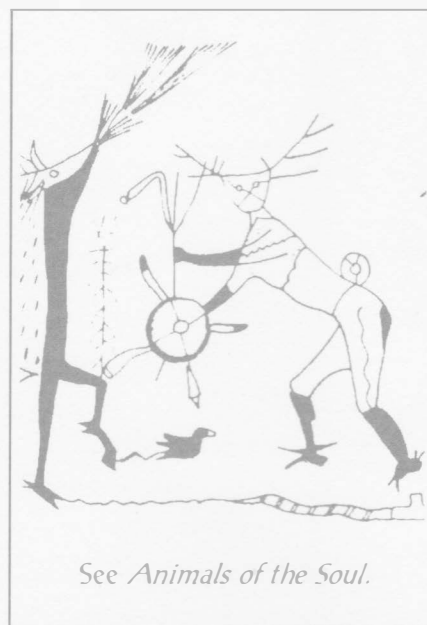
A guide to lake serpent legends around the world

Dragon's Head Press 1997  
A5, 18 pages, card covers, £1.99

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Bob Trubshaw



See *Animals of the Soul*.



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